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COLONEL FANE'S SECRET.

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CHAPTER V.

THE OLD, OLD STORY.

HUGH CHETWODE could not resist his fate. Given a pair of bright eyes, a lovely face, an engaging manner and constant intercourse, and no amount of resolve can save a susceptible man. He dallies with his fate until he is too hard hit to retreat, and so becomes more and more involved in the meshes. The only possible safety is in early flight—flight when the tenderness of the eyes first stirs the soul, before the craving for constant intercourse becomes irresistible.

The hours at the Chalet glided by like a pleasant dream. There were rides and drives without end to the lovely nooks of the north coast. Walks in the shade of the shrubberies during the noontide heat. Dreamy hours on the moonlit beach, with only the lapping waves and whispered words to break the stillness of the night.

Lindsay and his wife had not quite got over the honeymoon stage. Bates was intent upon his fossils and his lichens. Vera and Hugh were, therefore, thrown constantly together, and Fanny encouraged the intercourse with all the cunning which happy married women are apt to employ on such occasions.

Hugh had a fine baritone voice, and Vera a clear soprano. Both sang with taste and feeling, if not with much cultivation. Of course, some duets were found, mostly of the sentimental class, as nine duets out of ten are. They breathed vows of eternal constancy to each other under the thin veil of Italian; and as Vera knew next to nothing of the language, and Hugh nothing except a questionable pronunciation, they warbled the most intense love-passages to each other quite unconsciously. Possibly, as the "Angiolo mio, vivo per te" swelled forth, they had a dim consciousness that it was something

very tender, but it was rendered so beautifully vague by the liquid foreign language, and the music was so ravishing, that neither paused to analyse their words or the possible results.

Among their excursions they paid a visit to the Colonel and pressed him on the subject of Vera's visit to London. The Colonel shook his head. His means were very limited, and he knew that a trip to London meant a large outlay. He had—like many other foolish people—commuted his pension for a fixed sum, and then lost nearly all in ill-advised speculations. But for a small annuity which he had purchased, he would have been reduced to a very low ebb; but still when he had the chance he speculated in a small way, and so kept himself on the verge of poverty. The Stock Market is like the gaming-table. The odds are against the outside public; but the public will not lay this truth to heart.

But when the Colonel himself was included in the invitation, there were evident symptoms of giving way. He had not been in London for many years. He would probably meet with profitable investments if he were on the spot, which might retrieve his ruined fortunes.

An end was put to his hesitation, a few mornings after the proposal was made, by the old nurse coming to him and suggesting that it would be well to let Miss Vera go, as "in such company" she might make a good match, and the opportunity ought not to be lost.

The Colonel had never regarded the matter in this light. Like most fathers, he failed to quite realise that Vera was no longer a child and that she was very lovely. Of course he would not like to make a sacrifice of her at the Shrine of Mammon; but, he reflected, there are many very estimable men with plenty of money who would make her happy. He resolved, therefore, to scrape together all his available means, and not only let Vera go, but go himself.

Acting upon this resolve he wrote :

"MY DEAR VERA—I have thought the matter over and I have come to the conclusion that it would be selfish in me to keep you here if your friend wishes you to return with her. In fact I think if Lindsay will have me, I should like to spend a week or two in town myself. You may therefore consider the matter settled."

This permission meant far more to Vera than to any of the rest. It was the going forth from her retired life with its simple tastes and negative contentment, to plunge into the excitement of that great world which had hitherto seemed to her like a dim unreality. Of course at her age the prospect was more than delightful, and, sweetest of all thoughts, she was to see the great world in the company of one who already appeared to her like a hero of romance.

"Upon my soul, Fan, it seems a thousand pities after all to take her into that vortex of all the vices—London. She will be courted, and flattered, and petted, and spoiled. The simplicity and purity of her nature will be destroyed," quoth Hugh.

"You don't think she is courted, and flattered, and petted, and spoiled here then, Hugh? You don't think you are the chief culprit in the matter?"

"Well, no. My admiration is at least sincere. In London she will be surrounded by a lot of shallow-pated fools with no end of coin who will do their best to turn her head without entertaining one honest or sincere thought about her."

"You are beginning to be jealous in advance, Hugh. 'Oh, beware, my lord, of jealousy!'"

"Nonsense! jealous! In the first place I have no right to be jealous, and in the next, if I had, I have too much respect for myself and for her."

"Why not secure to yourself the right to watch over her by asking her to marry you?"

"I have given you my reasons already. It would be a cruel injustice to make her tie herself to me until I see my future more clearly. Fancy a girl like that engaged to me for two or three years at the very least, and I away in Australia!"

"You know you would be miserable at the thought of losing her. I can see that already."

"Perhaps you are right there, but if she cares in the least for me, as I sometimes think she does, she would be just as likely to be true to me without a pledge as with one."

"I don't quite see how you can expect her to be true to you unless you say something to her. How is she to know you even desire it?"

"There is sense in that, I admit. And yet I can't help thinking it would be unjust to ask her to bind herself to me. Indeed, I could not do it."

"Well, let us see what a few weeks of London life will do. I shall be greatly mistaken if you don't find yourself bound to propose in self-defence when you see her surrounded by admirers."

"I'll tell you what, Fan, you ought never to have thrown us together. You might have foreseen the result."

"I did," said Fanny, naively.

"Then you must abide by the consequences, Fan. I only hope they will not be serious."

"I don't see how they can be if you speak out like a man and either carry her off at once or ask her to wait a year or two. It is no great hardship after all. I had to wait three years."

"Yes, and saw your beloved about three times a day. Very hard lines that. Besides, as I said before, there is the Colonel to consult. I have not even a home to take her to, and that is a fatal obstacle. I have been a fool. I ought not to have stayed here. But it seems like a fate my meeting with her and all that. The best way even now would be to go away as soon as possible and try to forget her."

"That would be such wonderfully fair treatment to her, would it not? To make her love you, and then run away. Hugh, I am ashamed of you!"

"Oh, you women! You would marry your aunt to your grandfather if you couldn't bring about any other match!" said Hugh.

"There's Vera waiting for you on the beach. You promised to take her out in a boat, you know. Oh, you sapient brother! How I do love your prudence, and how much you mean to exercise it this evening, don't you?"

It was the old, old story. The days glided by, and still Hugh Chetwode showed no signs of withdrawing from temptation though the thought of parting became a deeper and deeper trouble. The summer days were merging into autumn, and the Jersey trip would soon be a thing of the past; but still there was the visit to town to look forward to.

One morning at breakfast Mrs. Lindsay put down a letter she had been reading, and suddenly exclaimed, "That settles the question!"

"What settles the question?" asked her husband.

"Why, Rose Fortescue's theatricals come off in three weeks' time, and we are to begin rehearsing at once; so we must go as soon as possible."

"Who's Rose Fortescue?" asked Hugh with visible annoyance.

"A most delightful little woman with a charming house at Brighton. Any amount of money, too," said his sister.

"Rather an odd time of year for theatricals, isn't it?" asked her husband.

"Not a bit of it. People don't know what on earth to do with themselves when they get to the seaside. Besides, they are for a charity, and plenty of people will take tickets. It will be a sort of beginning of the Brighton festivities."

"And what is your part?" asked Hugh.

"I? Oh, I play my old part of Mrs. Sternhold in 'Still Waters'! I am a matron now, you know, and can no longer play the *ingénue*. By the way, Rose has been disappointed in the girl who was to have played Emily. I wish I knew someone who could take it. Why, goodness me, Vera, you would be the very thing for it!" she suddenly exclaimed.

"I?" said Vera, colouring. "I never acted a part in my life."

"That doesn't matter. Everybody must have a beginning, and you would look the part to perfection."

"But I know nothing about it. I should spoil the whole thing!" protested Vera.

"No, you would not. I'll get Mr. Colborne to coach you. He's as good as a professional."

"Oh, no, no! I am sure I could not do it!"

"And I am equally sure you could. You have a head on your shoulders and something in it, though you are so quiet. Why, now

I think of it, you used to recite the whole of the 'Legend of Provence' to us at school, and make us all cry our eyes out."

"That was a very different matter."

"Not a bit of it. It is you quiet girls who often turn out the best actresses. I shall write off to Rose at once."

"I shall be frightfully nervous."

"That everybody is—a sure sign of genius, my dear. You can't live all your life as you have been doing. You must make a plunge, and the sooner the shock is over the better."

Hugh thought how much better and purer the life of the girl was here, and a strange foreboding of evil in connection with her future came over him. But he knew this simple life—the dreaming away of summer days—could not last. The inevitable jostling with the world comes to us all sooner or later, and we must face it whether we like it or not.

CHAPTER VI.

AT BRIGHTON.

"I THINK, of all people in the world deserving of pity, the woman who undertakes to get up amateur theatricals is to be pitied most!" said pretty Mrs. Fortescue.

Mrs. Fortescue was of the class who get up in the morning and say, "How shall I amuse myself to-day, and what shall I have for dinner?" Therefore, the small troubles of life troubled her very much, because she did not see why on earth she should have any troubles at all. If she had been of the class who get up in the morning and say to themselves, "Shall I get any work to-day, and shall I earn enough to get some dinner," the word trouble would have had a different meaning for her.

All troubles and all joys are comparative. With Mrs. Fortescue's surroundings, her worst troubles would have been bliss to the poor starving wretch in the gutter. Still, everyone thinks his or her own trial the worst, and Mrs. Fortescue was no exception to the rule.

"What is it now, Rose?" asked her friend Mrs. Lindsay, who was looking up her part on a couch in the corner.

"Why, Bertie has played me false, after all! He says he cannot possibly come here until November. It's all those wretched grouse and salmon! I wish the salmon and grouse were at Jericho! Who on earth is to play John Mildmay? Fan, do you hear? Who on earth is to play John Mildmay?"

"I haven't the faintest idea," answered her friend dreamily, her head still running on her part.

"But you must have! You helped me out of a difficulty with Mrs. Mildmay, and you must find me a Mr. Mildmay! If you are only half as successful with the latter as the former, I shall think you

an angel, for your friend is the most charming girl I have met for a long time!"

"Good gracious!" suddenly exclaimed Mrs. Lindsay.

"What is it, Fan? You've thought of some one? I know you have; I can see it in your face!"

The fact is, a sudden idea had flashed into Mrs. Lindsay's mind. She had been trying all she knew to throw her brother and Vera together, and here was a chance indeed. If they played Mr. and Mrs. Mildmay together it would clinch the matter, she was sure. But would he consent?

"Well, be quick! Who is it?" demanded impatient little Mrs. Fortescue.

"I was thinking of my brother," said Fanny, hesitatingly.

"The very thing!" said her friend. "He has just the quiet manner which would suit the part. Do you think he would come?"

"I might ask him, at any rate," said Fanny.

"Then, my dear girl, do it at once! There is not a moment to be lost! Is he good at acting?"

"He used to be very good indeed before he went to Australia. He would shut himself up in an attic when a boy and spout Shakspeare by the hour for his own amusement. We all said he would have made his mark on the stage."

"Well, it is quite a fashionable occupation nowadays. It is a pity he didn't try that instead of going to Australia."

"Oh, he will do very well there, I hope. Of course, it takes time!"

"But it is such dreadful banishment to a man with refined tastes. When will you write to him? Do get him to come down at once!"

So Fanny wrote, and by return of post came a letter from Hugh to say he would take the part, and Mrs. Fortescue was quite beaming again with this load off her mind.

They had all come over from Jersey a week or two before, and the Colonel and his daughter were staying with the Lindsays in town. Mrs. Lindsay had run down to Brighton to settle preliminaries with her friend, and they were all to come down in a few days to commence rehearsals and stay for the performance.

It would be a strange return to Vera, the coming back to the place where she had been as a schoolgirl—to be now the guest of one of the richest and most popular women in Brighton, and to take a leading part in an entertainment which was likely to draw all the rank and fashion of the town and neighbourhood. Her life had been so quiet and uneventful in her island home that it was difficult to realise the change.

Meanwhile Hugh was fulfilling his duties as a cicerone to perfection. It was a quiet time of year in town. Westminster Abbey, St. Paul's, even the Zoological Gardens were fairly free from visitors, and Hugh made the most of his opportunity. When Mrs. Lindsay was in town she

of course accompanied Vera and her brother on their various rounds ; and now and then the Colonel went ; but at times both were engaged elsewhere, and Fanny thought it a great pity that any time should be lost, and as it all tended to the end she had in view she begged Hugh to take her friend somewhere. Vera had a dim notion that it was not quite the correct thing, but she was so innocent of heart and had by this time become so familiar with her dear friend and schoolfellow's big brother that she could hardly raise any objection to plans her friend sanctioned and to which even her father raised no objection. As to that worldly-minded old gentleman, he probably had awakened to the fact that a well-to-do squatter who was every inch a gentleman might not prove a bad alliance after all, and so he threw no obstacles in the way.

But for Hugh there was now no going back. Every day, every hour, only made this girl more dear to him, and the temptation to be with her from morning till night was more than he could resist. He grew more and more reckless as to the consequences. The present was what he lived for, the future must be left to take care of itself.

CHAPTER VII.

SUNSHINE ON THE SANDS.

"It was the most marvellous thing I have ever seen," said Mr. Fortescue. "The girl seemed to go quite out of herself."

"And didn't she look pretty?" said Mr. Lindsay.

"Perfectly lovely!" chimed in Mrs. Fortescue.

"She'd make a fortune on the stage, that girl," said Mr. Colborne.

"I never coached anybody that read so intuitively what was wanted, and you say she has never acted before."

"Never since our small performances at our breakings up. She wouldn't have much chance in Jersey."

"Your brother was by no means bad," said Colborne. "He's just the sort of cool hand that's wanted for the part——"

"Oh, but he's an old stager. He used to play a good deal with a histrionic club in the West of England," said Mrs. Lindsay. "His Charles Surface was splendid, I believe, though I never saw it. But then they had such a capital coach at Bath in old Mr.—Mr.——"

"Chute," suggested Colborne.

"Yes, Chute, that was the name."

"Oh, he was the best coach in England. I owe the little talent I possess to him."

"Listen to the modesty of the man!" said Lindsay. "Why, we always consider you as good as a professional. Your Hawkesley was splendid. It seemed to come quite naturally to you. I felt inclined to hiss you."

"The best compliment you can pay me. Well, at any rate it

enables me to pick up a decent living among you amateurs. We impecunious younger sons must do something to turn an honest penny, and I suppose I do keep a lot of raw amateurs from making absolute fools of themselves."

"I am sure you were invaluable to us. I don't know what we should have done without you."

"It's very good of you to say so, but I may say in return that I have seldom had an easier task; as for Miss Fane, I can't get over it. She's a born actress. I'd give something to have the training of her and bring her out."

"Not much chance of that, Mr. Colborne," said Mrs. Lindsay. "She's much too sweet and simple for a life of excitement like that."

"That's just the beauty of it," rejoined Colborne. "It's the sweetness and simplicity that would hit the public."

"Who would knock it all out of her in no time," said Mr. Fortescue.

"No reason why they should," said Colborne. "Applause didn't spoil Lady Becher or Mrs. Kean, or a score of others I could mention."

"Who was Lady Becher?" asked Lindsay.

"Why, where were you 'ris'? The celebrated Miss O'Neil, to be sure. Came over from Ireland and electrified England with her Juliet, etc., made a fortune in five years and married Mr. Wrixon Becher, who afterwards became Sir Wrixon. Most immaculate woman, I believe, if there is such a thing."

"Your experience of women leads you to doubt this, does it, Mr. Colborne?" said Mrs. Fortescue, a little severely.

"Not when in your presence, Mrs. Fortescue."

"Oh, a compliment doesn't atone for a slur upon my sex, Mr. Colborne."

"Well, if the observation is out of order, I withdraw it. We mustn't quarrel on such a lovely morning. How splendid the sea looks with the sunlight shimmering all over it! What is it Shelley says?

"'Like light dissolved in star showers thrown.'"

"Very pretty, though I confess I don't see how you are going to dissolve what is already liquid."

"Don't spoil a beautiful passage by prosaic analysis," said Mrs. Lindsay. "But where in the world is Vera all this time? I believe she and Hugh have eloped."

"A man can't elope with his wife, can he?" said Mrs. Fortescue. "Mr. and Mrs. Mildmay went down to the beach half-an-hour ago. You people were so late at breakfast that I was half inclined to go with them."

All this conversation took place at a late breakfast table. Meanwhile Hugh Chetwode and Vera were improving the shining hours by the sea. They had gone out with the intention of taking a turn on the esplanade, but had wandered westward almost unconsciously,

until they found themselves under the cliffs beyond the eastern end of the beach.

Something that had occurred the night before had earned Hugh the right to wander about with Vera alone. The love passages in the play, added to his previous worship of this girl, had been too much for his resolve. Before they separated for the night he had found an opportunity for telling her what was in his heart, and had learned, too, with a thrill of joy, that her feeling was as deep as his own. It is little wonder they were abroad early the next morning. The sensation of a new delight, the exquisite sensation of loving and being beloved, was in their first waking thoughts. It seemed to Vera like some delightful dream—something she could scarcely realise—and she longed for the hour of meeting to come again so that she might be assured it was actually true.

Snatching a hasty breakfast they got away alone. By climbing over a groin or two they managed to get beyond the reach of the few loiterers who were about, and had found a sheltered nook among the chalk cliffs where they could sit unobserved.

The silver radiance Colborne had noticed was before them, stretching almost from their feet to the far horizon in a million million points of liquid light, skimming in swift shafts of silver along the curves of the wavelets as they broke upon the beach and changing the dull grey pebbles to tints of amethyst, topaz and opal; while the rhythmic lap lap of the waves was the only sound that broke the intense stillness of the air. It was one of those mornings when "all the earth and air" seem filled with an ineffable splendour which no words can describe; which seem to lift us to a world in which sin and sorrow can have no part, making existence itself an unspeakable delight.

"Is it not glorious?" said Hugh.

There was no response. Hugh looked round surprised. Vera's eyes were filled with tears.

"What is it, my dearest?"

She turned suddenly towards him. The next moment his arm was round her, and her head was on his shoulder.

"Oh, Hugh, I am too happy. What should I have done if you had gone without speaking to me? It is all so new, so wonderful."

"My darling, I did not speak before, because I did not know you loved me, and because I thought it better for you that I should not speak; but to actually hold you in my arms last night; to be speaking to you words of love, words that I was feeling in sober earnest, was a greater temptation than I could resist. Do you mean to say you have loved me all this time?"

"Yes, I think so. I did not know what it was; but I have been different ever since that first day I met you. Oh, if you had gone without telling me you loved me, I think it would have broken my heart."

"My dearest, if I had only known."

"But what will your sister say? I hope she will not be very angry."

"Angry! Why, she has been urging me to this ever since I met you. She was quite put out with me because I said I did not think I was justified in telling you what I feel."

"Why not?"

"Because I have no settled home to take you to. I have done very well, but things fluctuate so in the colonies. A man may be rich one day and poor the next. It may be some years before I can call myself a rich man, and offer you a settled home."

"What does that matter if you love me. Besides, I could not leave my father now."

"Not even for me?"

"Well, I could not refuse you if you wished it; but you will not, you are too good."

"I don't know that, but I hope, before long, to offer him a home too. It is the separation that is so terrible, now that I know you love me."

"But it will not be for long. Besides, if you care for me as you say, I shall feel that you are with me always—always. In thought and spirit we shall never be apart."

"Never, I hope."

"When will you tell them, Hugh?"

"At once—this morning. If I did not tell them in words my looks would show it, so it is better to make a clean breast of it at once."

"And when must you go?"

"Within a fortnight at most. My affairs want looking after. Do you know, if it had not been for you, I should have gone a month ago."

"Oh, Hugh; suppose I have done you some harm!"

"Do not think that. You have given me the greatest happiness I have ever known—greater than I believed it was possible for anyone to feel on this earth. And do you really mean to say you love me well enough to wait for me possibly for three or four years?"

"Love you well enough? Why, I have never loved anyone else, and never could love anyone again if I lost you. Oh, no, no, that would be too terrible!"

He drew her closer to him, and for a few moments the past and the future were blotted out and they lived only in the exquisite present.

The radiance still danced upon the sea, the silver shafts still darted along the breaking waves which fell with their quick thud, thud upon the beach below; the sky above was of stainless blue; the seaweed fragrance scented the air. The happiness of heaven was in the hearts of these two—and the brightness of heaven was on earth and sea.

CHAPTER VIII.

HUGH DEPARTS.

WHEN sunlight floods the air, and the sky stretches its stainless blue overhead, how little we think of the clouds that even now are gathering below the far horizon! Vera seemed to have reached the very summit of happiness on that bright morning. Her hitherto uneventful life, with its negative joys and cares, had suddenly developed into a very intoxication of delight. It seemed now that she possessed the love of one who was to her the perfection of manhood, that she could never be unhappy again. Even the approaching parting, which was the only shade in all her sunlit future, was not so much to be dreaded. She would hear from him by every mail—there would be the constantly recurring delight of his letters, and the time of waiting might possibly be shorter than either she or Hugh anticipated.

Mrs. Lindsay had taken the matter quite calmly. Her shrewd mind had foreseen the inevitable result of this constant intercourse, and she was not in any way surprised when the two wanderers came in from their walk and made a clean breast of it. She took Vera in her arms and embraced her warmly.

"My dear Hugh," she said, "you have made me the happiest of mortals. You know how I love Vera, and you know how fond I am of you. You are just suited to each other."

Vera looked unutterably happy, but very shy. It was all so new, so strange.

"I thought you might have objected," she said.

"Objected! When I have been doing my level best to bring it about! I was determined Hugh should not go back without speaking; and I generally do manage to get my own way, weak woman though I am. Rose will be delighted too, I am sure."

"I don't see how it concerns her," said Hugh, who thought Vera might be distressed at this sudden publicity.

"Why, she likes to see people happy, and I am sure you both look brimming over with happiness. Besides, she must have seen what has been going on. There was more than acting last night. I was afraid others might notice it."

"Well, at any rate, my first business is to go to town and see the Colonel. When are you going up?" said Hugh.

"We were going to-morrow, but if you must go we may as well all go to-day. Rose will quite understand."

The Colonel had not been lured to Brighton—he was too busy with his City friends—so, as soon as they reached town, Hugh sought an interview, and somewhat to his surprise met with little or no opposition from his future father-in-law. The only stipulation the

Colonel made was that he would not marry until his prospects were more settled and he was in a position to keep a wife in comfort.

There were yet many things to be seen and done. Theatres to be visited and museums to be inspected. There was a piece running at the newly-erected Thespian Theatre which all London was talking about, and Mr. Lindsay secured a box.

It was a play of absorbing interest. Vera, to whom it was all such an entire novelty, hung upon every word. Even Hugh's soft whispers were to some extent disregarded, so intent was she on the play. One scene opened with a dance of villagers on the marriage-day of the heroine of the piece.

"How pretty the bride is!" said Mrs. Lindsay. "Do look, Hugh!"

Hugh had been more intent in watching Vera's enjoyment than in seeking any enjoyment himself. He had seen similar stage festivities a score of times. He turned his eyes somewhat impatiently to the stage.

"Don't you agree with me? I think she is quite lovely, and she is looking straight this way. Why, Vera, I believe you have fascinated her!"

There certainly was something strange in the actress's manner. As her eyes turned towards the Lindsays' box her attention seemed suddenly arrested, and she half stopped in the middle of a sentence. Then, as if with an effort she went on, but with a strange faltering accent.

"What in the world is the matter with her?" said Mrs. Lindsay. "She must be unwell. Did you not notice, Hugh?"

She turned to her brother. He was sitting quite back in the shadow of the curtains. There was no answer.

"Why, what is it, Hugh?" said his sister. Even in the shadow she had noticed his pale face. All thoughts of the stage and the actress were forgotten. Vera turned quickly as Mrs. Lindsay spoke, but by this time Hugh seemed to have recovered himself.

"I don't feel any particular interest in village dances—they bore me," he said.

Vera looked at him a little reproachfully. "I think it delightful!" she said.

"Well, dearest, enjoy it as much as you can. It is all fresh to you. I will take a turn outside, and be back when the village festivities are over."

But Vera's enjoyment was gone. "You will not be long, Hugh?" she said.

"Oh, no! To tell you the truth, I am not feeling very well. I think it is the heat of the house. A turn outside will do me good."

He was back in ten minutes, but he was not himself though he strove hard to hide it.

The box was a small one, the only one that could be had. When

Hugh went out, Mr. Lindsay had taken his place beside Vera. He was about to move when Hugh re-entered the box, but the latter stopped him.

"No, stay where you are," he said; "I will sit here."

He took a chair behind, still partly screened by the curtain. An exciting scene was going on and the others did not take much notice. Only Vera turned and said in a low tone:

"Are you better?"

"Oh, yes, I am all right now," he whispered back.

When the heroine re-appeared she seemed to have recovered her equanimity. She glanced at the box again, but did not appear further disturbed, and in due course the play came to an end.

The most intense joys must in the nature of things be of short duration. One's capabilities of enjoyment cannot be kept at full stretch for any length of time. Even if the source of joy remains the same, custom must to some extent take off the keen edge. In Vera's case, however, the source was to be withdrawn, for the hour of Hugh's departure was at hand and in spite of all the thoughts from which she had tried to gather consolation, her heart sank very low indeed. The weather had changed, too, and when the time came for the departure of the passengers by the special train that was to bear them to the huge leviathan which lay off Gravesend waiting to receive them, the rain came swooping down and the clouds looked so black and gloomy that it was impossible to realise that the blue heavens still stretched bright above them, or that such a day as the one when they were on the beach at Brighton had ever existed. As with all sensitive natures, the weather affected Vera as it does a thermometer, and the gloom of the morning added to the pain of parting sent her heart down to the lowest depths.

They all went down to Gravesend to see Hugh off. Even the Colonel dragged himself away from the City for the occasion. The ship had dropped down the river on an early tide and they joined her in the afternoon. There was some delay, as an important Colonial official had not arrived and the ship would not get under way until sundown.

Hugh and Vera were on the upper deck somewhat apart. Most of the passengers were busy arranging their various cabins, and Mr. and Mrs. Lindsay and the Colonel kept judiciously away.

"You will let me hear at every port we touch at after Malta, won't you, dearest," said Hugh. "If you begin writing at once, the letters will be there before us. Here is a list with dates for posting. I will have a letter ready to send from each place for you."

"It will be my only consolation. It is terrible to think you are going! What shall I do without you? Oh, it has been such a dream of happiness!"

"My darling. Let us hope this parting will not be for long. You have nerved me to greater exertion. Perhaps some good turn of luck

may come, and I may be home again to claim you in a year or two."

"Oh, pray heaven you may!"

"And you will not let anything or anybody take your thoughts from me? Even now I feel that it is hardly fair to have bound you to me. What may you not be sacrificing for my sake."

"What could ever be of value to me in comparison with your love?"

Hugh clasped her hand silently. Their hearts were too full for words, for at this moment the bell sounded and they knew their parting was at hand.

A wealth of crimson and gold was piled in untold majesty in the western sky, tinging the passing ships, and flinging a filigree of opaline tints on the broad reach of the river. How Vera would have revelled in the sunset splendours a week ago! Now, as the tender bore them shoreward, her tear-dimmed eyes were fixed upon the solitary form that stood gazing after them as they receded further and further away. Presently, as they watched, with a sudden upheaving of white water, the screw began to turn and the huge vessel glided evenly on its way. From the landing-place they stood and watched it until the dear loved form dwindled to a mere speck and was at length lost to view.

Then Vera turned with a sickening of the heart such as she had never before known, and leaning on her friend's arm, was half supported to the train.

Oh, these partings! They seem to tear the life out of young hearts. It is only after long years of trouble that we learn to realise

"How divine a thing it is
To suffer and be strong."

CHAPTER IX.

RUIN.

THE parting over, all Vera's thoughts turned once more to her quiet home in Jersey. London with its restless life was hateful to her now that Hugh was no longer by her side. When their visit to the Lindsays came to an end she thought her father intended to return home at once. Then she might re-visit the scenes where she and Hugh had been together in the days when love first dawned upon their hearts; recalling every word and tone and looking every week for news of him in the eagerly expected letters.

A return to Jersey at present, however, was the last thing in the Colonel's mind. He was far too much involved in investments by which he was speedily to realise a fortune, and to his daughter's consternation he suddenly announced his intention of taking lodgings in town for at least a few weeks.

"It is all for your future good, my dear," said he. "Sharp has put me on to a splendid thing that must turn up trumps, and you will be a rich woman yet. You would not object to bringing a snug little fortune to your future husband, would you?"

Vera's mind was an absolute blank as regards stocks and shares, and she had implicit faith in her father's sagacity. Her heart fell, however, at the news.

"Fanny and the Fortescues leave for Italy in a fortnight," she said, "and they will winter abroad. I was so hoping we were going home!"

"So we shall, my dear, in a few weeks. I only want to wait until these things mature, then we will go back and have a merry time of it. Between you and me, I have been very anxious for some time past. There is a good deal owing at St. Heliers, and I didn't see my way to clearing it off. Now, from what Sharp says, all further anxiety will be at an end in a few weeks."

There was nothing for Vera but to submit, though she did so with a heavy heart. They found some lodgings to suit them in a quiet street in Bayswater, where she was at least within reach of the Park and Kensington Gardens, both of which she had visited with Hugh, so this was some consolation to her; but still the days dragged heavily enough.

"My dear child, how I do wish you were going with us!" said Mrs. Lindsay, when the eve of their departure for the South arrived. "But I suppose nothing would induce you to leave your father?"

"Oh, no—I could not think of it!" said Vera. "But it is very good of you to wish me to go!"

"Ah, well, I expect one of these days Hugh will be taking you, and you will enjoy that a great deal more. Never shall I forget my first trip there with Fred; it was simply heavenly!"

Vera thought a trip there with Hugh would be quite as heavenly. In fact, she went further, and thought it was quite impossible that any other mortals under the sun could feel the intensity of enjoyment that she and Hugh would feel under such circumstances; but this idea she kept to herself.

The Lindsays and Fortescues had departed, and the dull days of autumn came down on London with fog and rain. The streets wore their most dismal aspect, the parks even were almost deserted, and Vera longed more and more for the warmth and sunshine of her home. Every day her father told her that he would be ready to depart soon, but she could not fix him to any particular time. In fact, the Colonel had taken a desperate plunge. His friend Sharp had a scheme which, as usual, was bound to make the fortunes of every one who went into it.

"Get together every farthing you possess, Fane, and put it into this. I have the most trustworthy information. You are bound to double your capital in a month—bound to, I tell you!"

The Colonel had still a small reserve of caution left.

"How do you know this?" he said.

"A cable from Wellwood of New York this morning—one of the leading firms over there. They say the shares *must* rise fifty per cent. in a fortnight, and go on rising. They have the best information; they can have no object in deceiving me."

"Look here, Sharp," said the Colonel—"I have known you and dealt with you for many years, and I am sure you wouldn't deceive me. If on your solemn assurance I can double my capital in a month, I should be a fool to lose the chance. You know I cannot afford to lose the little I have left. Under these circumstances, do you still advise me to go in for this?"

"Most undoubtedly; it is a certainty, I tell you."

Sharp had no intention of deceiving him. His was a sanguine nature, and he fully believed what he said.

"Very well, then; I will take your word for it. I am getting a beggarly percentage now. Sell these at the market price, and put the amount into your scheme. I will hand you over the scrip to-morrow."

He put a list into his friend's hand. Sharp glanced over it.

"No very great amount in these, I fear. Still, if you double it, so much the better for you."

The arrangement was thus concluded. The Colonel had put all his eggs into one basket; he stood to stand or fall.

A fortnight elapsed. The shares had gone up to a premium; the next day they were higher. The next there came the news of a panic in Wall Street. All the American securities were down. The Colonel hurried off to his friend.

"This is not in accordance with your views. What is the meaning of it?" he asked.

"It means this infernal crisis! Don't be afraid; it can't last."

"Would it not be better to sell at the present price? I can't risk my all, you know."

"Certainly not. They *must* recover. Don't be afraid."

The Colonel went home by no means happy. He could not hide his anxiety from Vera, but he knew she would not understand even if he tried to explain. In fact, he would have been ashamed to tell her that he had risked his all.

The next day there was another drop. The shares would not fetch a quarter of the amount he had invested. He hurried to the City.

Sharp met him with a long face.

"Bad news this, Fane," he said, putting a telegram into his hand.

It was to the effect that the scheme, to use a familiar phrase, had "bust up." It was little less than a swindle; the shares were not worth the paper they were printed on.

The blow was too sudden and severe for the Colonel to think of reproaches. He turned away dazed and bewildered, and passed out

of the office without a word. Ruin—absolute ruin—was what it meant. The full extent of his folly rushed in upon him like a sudden flood, and he cursed the hour when he first set foot in the City. It seems difficult to realise that men can thus rush blindly on their own destruction, but we know that dozens of similar cases happen every day. When the demon of gambling gets hold of a man, sense and reason vanish. Until the State recognises that gambling and drunkenness are acts of lunacy, these vices will still claim their daily victims by the score.

For several hours the Colonel paraded the streets, not knowing what to do or where to go. He had a few pounds in his pocket, and at length, from sheer physical exhaustion, he turned into an hotel and ordered some dinner. With the true spirit of the gambler, he grew reckless with regard to the few coins in his possession, and ordered a bottle of a specially expensive brand of champagne. He finished the bottle to the last drop, and as the fumes of the wine mounted to his head, his troubles seemed lighter, and he felt disposed to treat the whole matter as a huge joke. He went to the smoking-room, and, lighting a big cigar, sat himself down in an easy-chair and tried to consider his position seriously. The wine, however, was too potent, and, before his cigar was finished, he was asleep.

That insidious fiend alcohol had soothed him for a time, but Nemesis was to come. The Colonel slept for some time—long enough, in fact, for his brain to become clear and for the reaction to set in. When at last he woke in the full possession of his faculties, his position came back to him with overwhelming force. The blackness of despair settled down upon him, grasping his heart like the claws of a vulture.

"What on earth shall I do?" he exclaimed. "I cannot bear this; I shall go mad!"

He went out and wandered down to the Embankment, and stood gazing for a long time at the brown flood that has carried so many miserable wretches from the verge of this world to that of the world to come—a veritable Styx without even the guidance of a Charon.

"I cannot face *her*," he said; "her innocent eyes would altogether unman me! Great Heaven, if I could only undo the last three weeks!"

That is the bitter cry of all after our evil deeds—if we could only undo them! Alas, the cry always comes too late!

The thought occurred to him that possibly another cigar would calm him and enable him to form some course of action. The thought of meeting Vera and of having to confess his folly was unendurable. He returned to the smoking-room of the hotel, and ordered some coffee and a cigar.

When the waiter brought them, he thought the Colonel had fallen asleep. He was lying back in the deep easy-chair, perfectly motionless and breathing heavily.

"Your coffee, sir," the man said quietly; but still Colonel Fane did not move. He looked more closely, and something in the Colonel's face caused him to utter a cry. The next moment a group had gathered round, and it was seen that the Colonel was unconscious. A messenger was at once despatched for a doctor, and on inquiry at an adjoining club, a well-known physician was found engaged at cards with a friend. It was explained to him that a gentleman had been seized with a fit at the hotel next door, and he at once hastened to the spot and made a hurried examination.

"He must be taken to the hospital at once," he said, "but I'm afraid it is too late."

The police were summoned and a stretcher brought. The hospital was not far off. Amid a scene of much excitement, Colonel Fane was carried away. The doctor went as far as the door, and then returned to his seat in the card-room of the club.

His opponent, who had somewhat resented this disturbance of his evening game, turned to him languidly.

"What was it—heart?"

"No, apoplexy."

(To be continued.)

TO THE MEMORY OF LONGFELLOW.

WE read thy verse, and straightway through us sweep
The mystic meanings which thy mighty mind
Was able out of life's sad maze to find.
Thy utterances roll inward from the deep
Of thy great spirit; thou our hearts canst keep
Hushed into silence, and our senses bind
In fetters to thy loftier thought, entwined
With sad sublimity, which makes us weep.

Thou, who the world hast gladdened with thy pen,
And cheered the weary with thy tuneful song,
Art blessed by thousands of thy fellow-men;
Thy words upraise, uphold, and make them strong,
And many welcomes glad will greet thee when
They meet thee 'mid the radiant spirit-throng.

ELIZABETH GIBSON.

OF THE FUTURE LIFE.

"Though Reason cannot through Faith's mysteries see,
It sees that there and such they be;
Leads to Heaven's door, and there does humbly keep,
And there through chinks and key-holes peep."

Abraham Cowley.

"[F," says Coleridge (in "Anima Poetæ"), "a man could pass through Paradise in a dream, and have a flower presented to him as a pledge that his soul had really been there; and if he found that flower in his hand when he awoke?—Aye! And what then?"

The saying itself is a flower of Paradise with, instead of dew, the tears of human longing on it. And there are many others, sometimes from the least likely sources, of the same mysterious charm, a charm that seems to come of intimacy with things above and beyond the things of earth, surprising even the ordinary doubting soul at times into a moment's vivid apprehension of a life beyond.

"Thus sailors with a crazy vessel crost,
Expecting every minute to be lost,
With weeping eyes behold a sunny coast"—

the exquisite image in which Allan Ramsay describes the landing of a storm-tossed spirit on the heavenly shore.

And if some of these fancies are like flowers gathered from fields beyond the sunset, some like jewels in the way they shine through the dark, there are others—and those not of the least reverent—that seem to break with gentle bursts of laughter on the solemn gloom of the grave, mocking its terrors, putting to flight the bogies of man's invention that are apt to haunt it.

The spell of some poets is in the high consolation they have to offer in view of death's bitter realities, that of others in their refusing to conceive of death as making any but the merest temporary break in our earthly relationships. Like the children of Landor's, or of Whittier's poem, they sport in the very churchyard, taking the image of Death himself for a playfellow. "Dead!" exclaims the American poet, Sill, ringing his sportive changes on the twin symbols of Death and Sleep—

"Nay, I smile at your shocked face! . . .
She will open her blue eyes
'Neath the palms of Paradise,
While we foolish ones shall weep."

Crashaw's tender little poem of more than two centuries ago, on

the young married couple "Dead and Buried together," has something of this sweet playfulness:—

"Peace, good reader, do not weep;
Peace, the lovers are asleep.
They, sweet turtles, folded lie
In the last knot that love could tie.
And though they lie as they were died,
Their pillow stone, their sheets of lead,
(Pillow hard, and sheets not warm),
Love made the bed; they'll take no harm.
Let them sleep, let them sleep on,
Till this stormy night be gone,
And the Eternal morrow dawn;
Then the curtains will be drawn,
And they wake into a light
Whose Day shall never sleep in Night."

So winning a presentment that it might half reconcile one to the idea of death as a sleep.

It is characteristic of this gentle poet, and in pleasing contrast to the attitude of certain others, whether of fierce revulsion or contemptuous pity towards death (Donne's "poor Death," the insulting "antic Death" of Shakespeare), that he can pause as he does, even in his rapturous strain of Easter triumph, to bestow a word of comfort—almost, as it were, of courteous apology—on the defeated foe:—

"Life, by this Light's nativity,
All creatures have;
Death only by this Day's just doom is forc'd to die,
Nor is Death forc'd, for may he lie
Thron'd in Thy grave,
Death will on this condition be content to die."

For since, as George Herbert quaintly observed in his last hours, we must die or not attain to heavenly happiness, on the image of death itself poets and visionaries have dwelt with delight or fear according to their several temperaments.

Death, says Novalis, is the romance of life. To some it is life's only romance, the fairy godmother who, when the hour strikes, will in a moment transform the dust and ashes of their present state into a scene of beauty and enchantment; the Prince whose kiss is to waken them from the troubled sleep of life into the shining fruition of their dreams.

For the rest, death is a new birth. It is the gate of life; the porter of the gate; the golden door of Heaven (in Blake's rapt vision) which the soul opens for herself with the golden key she finds in her hand on waking; the veil of mystery behind which all fair delights are concealed; a stair leading up from these damp vaults of earth into the light and air; a long darkness; a shadow ("the light, sweet shadow of death," Swinburne calls it); the dawning of a great light. Death is the restorer, the re-uniter, the rest-bringer. The

reaper, stern of aspect, if friendly of intention; the kinder-featured gardener, who transplants our perishing blooms to his Lord's vast gardens "nearer the sun." The "dark mother" of Whitman's ecstatic dreams. A mighty ocean, a swollen stream; a summer brook across which the listening ear can almost catch the voices of friends speaking on the other side. A bark sailing over the dim waters, to bear us whither we cannot tell—a bark with sable sail, but steered by a celestial pilot.

Death, in Sir Edwin Arnold's phrase, is a "strange delicious amazement." It is a change so slight that one's first words on recovering from the surprise will be (so a Transatlantic humorist puts it), "Oh dear, how natural it seems!" For the trembling hopes of a Cowper, the holy aspirations of a Jeremy Taylor or a John Bunyan, are balanced with many a lighter fancy, many an earthlier dream of heaven, even with some few such jaunty expressions of faith in the Divine goodness as that quoted of M. Thiers in Dean Stanley's *Life*, or the pitifully audacious appeal of the unhappy Scarron, in his death-hour—" *Dieu me pardonnera ; c'est son métier.*"

"The shapings of our heavens are the modifications of our constitution," says Charles Lamb. The infinite is wide enough for all, and where everything is uncertain the imagination is free to wander and create at will.

"For love is large as is yon heavenly dome :
In love's great blue, each passion is full free
To fly his favourite flight and build his home,"

says Sidney Lanier, in a sonnet which for fulness of suggestion and dignity of phrase might have been written by one of the old masters of song.

And since each may paint upon the void his own ideal there is scarcely an aspiration of the heart, human or heavenly, that has not found a voice to interpret it and plead for its fulfilment. The longing of a Rutherford for his Saviour, of a Petrarch for his Laura, of a Southey for his books—even to the "unknown want" that has no name on earth, the ideal after which a Shelley or a Schiller pines, and to which the robust-natured Whitman gives utterance in his lovely sea-chant, "Out of the cradle."

There is the longing of the weary for rest, utter rest, even to the "doing nothing for ever and ever;" also the wish for active service befitting the "full-grown energies of heaven," for the continuance, under altered conditions, of earth's familiar occupations and, what Whittier looked forward to, "the dear delight of doing good." There is the craving of the exile for home, of the storm-tost soul for peace, for a safe entrance, with never an exit, into the happy harbour of the saints, where not a wave of trouble rolls; and the exultant joy of a Browning or a Whitman in the anticipation of a free wing to explore the endless realms of space, while ever new wonders open on

the spirit, "flying secure and glad from heaven to heaven;" the wild desire as of some eager young sailor to start off upon a cruise of ceaseless adventure:

"Voyaging, voyaging, voyaging
For ever upon the seas of God."

There is the longing for youth and beauty; for knowledge and immortal truth; for music, joys, and transports in which there should be never a pause or break, and also for shadow, and dreams, and even slumbers like those of earth.

"There in calm and cooling sleep
We our eyes shall never steep,"

says Herrick, with a perceptible tone of regret, even in view of the ever-fresh delights he anticipates. Milton gives us a glimpse of the angels themselves sleeping, "fanned by cool winds," in their celestial pavilions. And Christina Rossetti has the courage of her desires, and does not hesitate to reckon sleep amongst the blessings of the blest in Paradise:

"I see the far-off city grand,
Beyond the hills a watered land,
Beyond the gulf a gleaming strand
Of mansions where the righteous sup;
Who sleep at ease among their trees,
Or wake to sing a cadenced hymn
With Cherubim or Seraphim."

Mrs. Oliphant, going further, allows her little pilgrim in the Unseen the luxury of a few happy tears.

There are those who are in love with this world and its ways, "this good world," as Lamb gratefully called it, "which was created so lovely, beyond our deservings," and who would like nothing better than to recover it, or its similitude, after death; who deprecate the very faintest suggestion of infringement, though it were by miraculous additions of knowledge and power, on the old familiar form of their being, and, like Pope's "poor Indian," would hardly be satisfied unless they could carry the least and meanest of their household gods along with them into the Unseen.

In his craving for this "humbler heaven," this sort of fairy-land heaven about which, as he says, "a poor human fancy may have leave to sport and air itself," Lamb would have had the sympathy of a member of that society he once wrote of with so quaint an appreciation—the intensely spiritual, intensely human Quaker poet, Whittier. He too subdues the splendour in imagination to the weakness of his mortal senses:

"I shrink from unaccustomed glory,
I dread the myriad-voicèd strain:
Give me the unforgotten faces,
And let my lost ones speak again."

So also does Milton, when he introduces "grateful twilight" into Heaven. Milton, indeed, as Emerson remarks, anticipated the leading thought of Swedenborg when he wrote :

"What if earth
Be but the shadow of Heaven, and things therein
Each to the other like more than on earth is thought?"

Tennyson lends his voice to it, through the mouth of King Edward the Confessor in "Harold" :

"Heaven and earth are threads of the same loom,
Play into one another."

Browning gives it his support in various passages, notably in the daringly happy suggestion occurring in "The Last Ride Together" :

"What if Heaven be that, fair and strong
At life's best, with our eyes upturned
Whither life's flower is first discerned,
We, fixed so, ever should so abide?"

Coleridge makes of this earth "a blessed shadow," in his rapturous poem, "On Revisiting the Sea-shore," through which, as through Pindar's Elysium,

"Breathes the shrill spirit of the Western wind;"

and Walt Whitman, David Livingstone (in view of approaching death), Frederic Maurice, and many more, all incline to this modified opinion of the great change. "After all," says Dr. George Macdonald, "it is but an outward change."

There are those also to whom, as to Baxter, the world has proved "dust and a shadow," who, despising the outer courts and purlieus of Lamb's lowlier aspirations, would with one bound exalt their mortal to divine, and looking down as it were even on the "star-gemmed floor" of Heaven, would pierce from light to light into the very presence of the Creator :

"For who would dwell in the servants' lodge
When the mansion-house is given?"

Dr. George Macdonald, mystical yet homely, blends these two aspects of the future life as perhaps no one else has done, craving the ever nearer and nearer approach to the All-Father, yet clinging to his earthly ties: "Come home with me, Beloved—there is but one home for us all."

The Beatific Vision well-nigh absorbs some souls, and gleams occasionally on the rapturous imagination of most. Others dare to hope, with Coventry Patmore, or with Whittier, that love to man will be accounted of as love to God, that love, in brief, is "one with holiness."

"I think of Heaven always as the place where I shall meet my mother," says Myrtle, in Holmes's "Guardian Angel." So the

heaven of most poets, as of us whose longings they interpret, resolves itself sooner or later into the trysting-place with their loved ones. This craving for reunion has been expressed by none more beautifully or with such assured hope as by Whittier; and for those of us to whom all the life of heaven were cold without "some sweet saint's hand to quicken in our palm," his utterances are amongst the most appealing:

"Not mine the sad and freezing dream
Of souls that, with their earthly mould,
Cast off the loves and joys of old . . .
No!—I have *Friends* in Spirit-Land,
Not shadows in a shadowy band,
Not *others*, but *themselves* are they.
And still I think of them the same
As when the Master's summons came;
Their change, the holy morn-light breaking
Upon the dream-worn sleeper, waking—
A change from twilight into day."

Such, cast in a thousand varying forms, is the unvarying burden of his song.

Mr. Coventry Patmore strikes the same pathetic human chord. God, he says, only tells us what, without His word, we could not have found out for ourselves, trusting to the human heart to reveal to us His kindlier promises—

"In hopes that come to all: so, Dear,
Trust these, and be of happy cheer."

The same speaker, the dying wife in "The Victories of Love," deprecating to her husband the notion that a loftier love should ever come between them, exclaims:

"Why, it seems almost wicked, Dear,
Even to utter such a fear!
Are we not 'heirs,' as man and wife,
Together, of eternal life?"

It may be remembered how Rogers, as Fields relates, broke down over the recital of Bryant's poem, "The Future Life," that touching tribute to a wife's devotion, worthy to rank with Dean Stanley's "Till Death us part: till Death us join," or with Lady Nairn's, "The Land o' the Leal." As the often cynical old bachelor poet pronounced the lines, slightly varying, it will be noticed, from the author's version:

"My name on earth was ever in thy prayer,
And must thou never utter it in Heaven?"

his voice, says the narrator, trembled, and he faltered out, "I cannot go on. There is something in that poem which breaks me down, and I must never try again to recite verses so full of tenderness and undying love."

On the reverse side, the spirits of the blest are represented as touched by mortal grief.

"And yet, methinks,
 Serious as well as sweet is bliss in Heaven,
 And permits pity for those that are left mourning,"

muses the bereaved lover in Leigh Hunt's "Legend of Florence." Spenser has a passage in "Daphnida" which forms, as it were, an exquisite corollary to the more familiar stanzas on angel ministry in "The Fairie Queen."

"And she—my Love that was—my Saint that is—
 When she beholds from her celestial throne,
 In which she joyeth in eternal bliss,
 My bitter penance, will my case bemoan,
 And pity me that living thus do die;
 For heavenly spirits have compassion
 On mortal men, and rue their misery."

The lines seem to include our heavenly relations, the spirits of our own loved ones, among those angel ministers employed on kindly embassies to men on earth. Dr. Johnson, in an *Idler* paper written a day or two after his mother's death, has the same beautiful thought. And Cowper's irreverie on the receipt of his mother's picture was soothed almost into forgetfulness of present woe by the fancy that in his childish misery for her loss she may have given him:

"Though unfelt, a kiss,—
 Perchance a tear—if souls can weep in bliss."

The old divine, Dr. Sherlock, quoted by Addison, pictures the soul as entering with one step, her first step out of the body, upon the beautiful "other world," which lies, he conjectures, all around us, only concealed from our vision by this mortal veil. So too Blake, Hare, Lowell, and many another.

"So Willy has gone, my beauty, my eldest-born, my flower;
 But how can I weep for Willy, he has but gone for an hour,—
 Gone for a minute, my son, from this room into the next;
 I, too, shall go in a minute. What time have I to be vexed?"

says "The Grandmother" of Tennyson's poem.

"Are heaven and earth as near as sea to strand?
 May life and death as bride and bridegroom kiss?"

queries Swinburne.

In others' fancies there is a journey to take, whether alone, love-guided, or under the conduct of angels—sweet guardian angels. And it is wonderful to think what charm of tenderness and beauty belongs to the very name of angel. So that we can find no dearer appellation than that even for our own beloved ones, whom in our secret hearts we all, like Newman, like Whittier, like Mr. Andrew Lang, like Lowell, would rather choose to give us welcome on the threshold of the Unseen than the fairest of "strange angels," as the little boy of

a German poem called them when he wanted his mother instead to protect him in the dark.

"Of the soul the body form doth take,
For soul is form, and doth the body make,"

says Spenser. And dear is the thought of the soul's resemblance to its sometime mortal frame: that the angel-faces whose smiles await us will be "the old familiar faces" of our earthly love: that the voices, however tuned to Heaven, will be those of Auld Lang Syne.

Archbishop Trench gives voice to a misgiving which must occasionally have come across most minds, as to whether God Himself will be able to provide,

"For the large heart of man what shall not pall,
Nor, thro' eternal ages' endless tide,
On tired spirits fall."

If time so often hangs heavy on our hands, how shall we be able to support eternity? Here we have the hope of heaven to sustain us; but if weariness should ever come upon us there—Emerson tells of a child who exclaimed, "What, never to die? Never—never! It makes me so tired to think of it!" But as Luther, fresher of spirit perhaps than many a child of our day, with equal truth and beauty, observed, in reference to the heavenly Fatherland he sighed after, "When one is happy, a tree, a nosegay, a flower can give one pleasure." Lowell, and when it may be he was not particularly happy, expressed a wish that he could lie under a tree for a year, "with no other industry than to watch the dapples of sunlight on the grass."

"Life is very sweet, brother," says the gipsy, Petulengro, in Borrow's "Lavengro." "A Romany chal would wish to live for ever." "In sickness, Jasper?" "There's the sun and stars, brother." "In blindness, Jasper?" "There's the wind on the heath, brother." Of such common materials, whether to the man of intellectual tastes and spiritual aspirations, or to the simple child of Nature, is the joy of existence made.

"Thank Heaven for breath! Yes, for mere breath, when it is made up of a heavenly breeze like this!" writes Hawthorne, under the influence of one of those golden autumn days which to him (as spring days to Douglas Jerrold) were the earnest of Immortality. And if now, as Sidney Smith has touchingly observed, God gives us mirth and beauty, and books and music and fragrance "to charm our pained steps over the burning marl"—

"And with a million spells enchants
The souls that walk in pain"—

if Monk Felix, in the old legend, could listen entranced to the singing of a bird while a hundred years passed by him like a pleasant dream—then the only dread remains

"Lest an Eternity should not suffice
To take the measure and the breadth and height
Of what there is reserved in Paradise—
Its ever-new delight."

With some the eternal passion is learning; with others it is art. Many, besides Albrecht Dürer, when their earthly machines are approaching ruin, have declared their minds to be crowded with ideas, suggestions, inspirations of beauty and music which they would have to die without fulfilling. Victor Hugo, in old age, after his manifold utterance of himself in various forms, declared that he had not uttered the thousandth part of what was in him. Mrs. Henry Wood, in the same spirit, said it would give her "the most intense pleasure" to go on writing books in heaven.

Apart from individual predilections, nothing is more striking than the difference of tone between older and more modern authors in their consideration of the future life. Between the wildly extravagant, what to some ears might almost sound as blasphemous, arrogations for themselves and their friends of some divine destiny, the anticipation of celestial glories in which, say, Milton or Ben Jonson, or even Crashaw and Norris of Bemerton thought fit to indulge; and the modesty, the, at times, shrinking humility with which writers of our own day deprecate the notion of "reward," even of bliss. To "ride triumphing in" to heaven, as Ben Jonson describes it in his elegy on a certain great lady; to reign as kings and queens in glory—"no marchioness, but now a queen," proclaims Milton on the death of another. To dive into all the secrets, all the beauties of eternity; to be "attired in stars"; to sit on thrones—a "refulgent thronelet" is what Herrick anticipates for his very mundane Julia. To associate on equal terms with all the spirits of light and—as Cowley imagines of Crashaw, or Matthew Prior of Purcell—to measure their singing powers with the angels. This was, as a rule, the old idea of the state to which "just men" might rightfully aspire. To creep in anyhow is what we ask for nowadays. "The wages of going on" is all that our austerer or less simple virtue demands; that the veil of pardoning mercy should be drawn over our good alike and ill.

Mercy for praise—to be forgiven for fame, pleads Coleridge.

"The best of what we do and are,
Just God, forgive!"

is Wordsworth's prayer on visiting the grave of Robert Burns, a pilgrimage which seems to have stirred his nature to its depths. The golden groves, the islands of the blest, all those images of rest and rapture on which our forefathers were wont to dwell with the frank delight of childhood, the "drops and dews of future bliss" where-with they refreshed themselves on the often arid path of duty, are condemned by the new righteousness, in a spirit savouring at times almost of pride, as

"Poor fragments all of this low earth,
Such as in dreams could hardly soothe
The soul that once had tasted of immortal truth."

Yet who can fail to be touched by the vein of homely sincerity that runs through even the most fantastical imaginings of the old writers—fighters, statesmen, worldlings, Puritans and saints alike—by the heart-whole confidence with which they threw themselves, body and soul, longings, hopes and interests on the world beyond?

It might be objected that dwelling on the invisible is apt to make one morbid, dreamy, and dissatisfied with the present. But the reverse has often proved to be the case. There was little trace of the sadly pensive which some consider the proper attitude to assume toward the future in those wide-awake old poets of a more stirring day. There is little of it in Browning, who bids us in one of his last utterances—

"At noonday, in the bustle of man's work-time,
Greet the Unseen with a cheer!"

The subject, whatever way considered, is one that requires all the comfort we can get. Not only the sweet, dumb voices of nature, but also the living voices of those who teach us, from experience they themselves have come through, how to guide our thoughts into the regions of hope; voices of saints, of sages, of poets; the voice of the simple herdsman among his mountains, as interpreted, in the very spirit of Browning's "Abt Vogler," by Wordsworth:

"He had early learn'd
To reverence the Volume which displays
The mystery—the life which cannot die;
But in the mountains did he *feel* his faith;
There did he see the writing—all things there
Breath'd immortality . . .

The least of things
Seem'd infinite; and there his spirit shaped
Her prospects, nor did he believe—he *saw*."

"Believe the muse!" pleads Thomson with wistful insistence, as if he longed to impart to others his own clear perception of the world beyond. And this thirst for the infinite, this hunger for eternity—innate proof, as Victor Hugo and so many others have considered it, of a future life—is met with amongst the choicer spirits of all times and lands. The intense desire to tear down the portals of the past, to recover one's treasures from the grave, bears its own fruit of hope in those even who have nothing but their own high instinct to teach them. Belief, says Romanes, following on Bacon, requires a far higher effort of the mind than unbelief.

"God has a few of us whom He whispers in the ear"; and, apart from divine revelation, those who are denied the innate assurance of immortality, with which some of the rarer souls are gifted, might take heart from the confidence of those others.

CROGINOLO.

I.

AN old Italian town. A town into which, even at the present day, the life of the outside world has barely penetrated; but within which legends of the past lurk thick as the shadows in the tortuous streets when the light of day is dying upon the hills around.

As your lone footsteps echo between the long lines of grim palazzi with their wrought-iron balconies, coats of arms, enormous *portes-cochères* and heavily grated windows, you cannot help imagination's calling forth the faces of long vanished generations, and fancying eyes are peeping curiously out through the rusty ironwork, mutely demanding who you are and whence you come.

Many of the streets are but scantily lit with an oil lamp here and there, hung in chains, so to say, high overhead, and swaying in the night wind with creak and rattle as any gibbeted malefactor might do; thereby causing your flesh to creep and a queer sensation to make itself felt at the roots of your hair. And there is one dreadful old house—once the den of all sorts of iniquitous laws and the most arbitrary justice—over whose gaping gateway three iron spikes are fixed, and upon which the heads of decapitated criminals used to be spitted and left to decay.

The shriek of the engine is but rarely borne to the place; for the nearest station is three miles off, with an intervening hill between, and when you scramble out of the rickety omnibus that deposits you at the door of the "Leon d'Oro," you feel as if that short, jolty drive had transported you out of the present to land you in the past. It may not be endurable in the long run; but for a short time, at least, it is delightful.

Nearly a century ago one of the biggest and gloomiest of the palazzi in this mediæval-looking city was still the residence of the Del Nero family, then the first, perhaps, in the place. One also that had figured largely in the feuds and fights, the broils and battles that had, more or less, raged throughout all Italy during the preceding centuries. At the time above mentioned, however, the family had lost almost all its local importance, though very wealthy, and had dwindled down to three in number: the count, the countess, and their only daughter, left a widow after a few months of a most unhappy married life. In spite of the number of servants kept, the inhabitants of that enormous pile must have felt themselves much as must some modern degenerate when encased in the armour that his doughty-limbed ancestors had worn with ease; and their footsteps

and voices must have awakened many a startling echo in the lofty chambers and interminable corridors.

Judging from a portrait in one of the now silent saloons, Countess Beatrice, the widowed daughter, must have been very handsome, though of the type that, while commanding admiration, rarely wins affection. She is painted there as tall and stately in form, with dusky black hair, and lustrous eyes that haunt you for days after having once gazed into them; a well-cut nose and lips, though too thin, and a creamy complexion, with just a tinge of colour warming it to life. She gives you the idea of a high-born dame well fitted to play the part of a heroine; but little adapted to dispense comfort to a household.

And, in truth, she does not appear to have displayed much taste for domestic tranquillity. From childhood upwards all had bent to her will, and none more submissively than her father and mother; till, at last, a sort of impression seemed to have rooted itself in her that the miniature world in which she lived had been created and placed there solely for her own particular pleasure and convenience. What she coveted must be obtained—what she commanded must be executed. Such appears to have been the law by which she ruled her life, and, unhappily, that of others also.

So thick are the walls of the Palazzo Del Nero that the embrasures of the windows resemble small rooms, and suffer but scant sunshine to illumine the lofty walls and richly stuccoed ceilings of the suites of apartments stretching right and left of the grand old lobby. Behind the building lies what was once a garden, but what is now only a labyrinth of unlopped trees and tangled shrubs; with here and there a marble basin filled with weeds in place of water, and the usual statues to be seen in all old Italian grounds.

Overlooking this wilderness is one particular room, still called "Countess Beatrice's chamber," which, better than the rest, has escaped the tooth of time and the desolation of decay. It is the last of a suite of five, and forms the extremity of the right wing of the building. It must have been left much as when its last occupant inhabited it. The thick yellow satin hangings yet wave their tatters from alcove, wall, and window; the toilette table, with its lacquer boxes and its tarnished mirror, still stands in its place; a spinet, once gorgeous in painting and gilding, yet occupies its corner, and the few notes that still respond to the touch give forth a faint wail, to which the few remaining cords of an elaborately-carved harp sadly respond. There are also high-backed chairs and spider-legged tables, a cabinet with dust-laden shelves, a huge frowning wardrobe and an ebony and ivory spinning wheel.

Let us go back to 179—

It is spring, and in the garden without the early flowers are beginning to bloom, flinging around their varied perfumes as freely as the birds are scattering their cheery chirp from the boughs above.

The two large windows of Beatrice's room are widely opened to admit scent and song. Not that she very much cared for either; but Nella, her humble companion and attendant, loved both, and silently wondered at times how it was possible for her black-browed mistress to remain insensible, as she did, to the ever-varying sights and sounds of nature.

The morning sun is slanting in, flinging a golden glory upon the many objects with which the room is filled; the motes are dancing merrily in the mellow light; the white Angora cat (Beatrice's only pet) has stretched himself in a sea of sunshine upon the dark, polished floor, too lazy to open eye or move ear, even though the chirping of the birds from below is loud and incessant.

Beatrice is standing at one of the windows, apparently, but not in reality, gazing at the glossy-leaved magnolias, the gleaming statues and the flashing fountains. Her thoughts are elsewhere. The light falls full upon her stately form, her dark braids, her low straight brows and creamy complexion; her long, trailing dress, deep blue in colour, rich in texture, falls to the ground in sweeping folds, while the wide open sleeves display a pair of arms such as a sculptor might dream of, but rarely meet with. Her hands are resting idly on the marble sill before her.

Her thoughts are with the past; not the turbulent past of her ancestors, with their warring and strife; but a past dating back but a few weeks—a dream of love, and the first that has ever flung its rainbow hues around her.

A gloomy aisle of the old church of San Donato, with its knightly tombs, its tattered banners, its dim, dusky shadows, its splashes of colour—red, blue, crimson, flung by the narrow-paned windows upon tessellated pavement, pillar and tomb; its odour of incense, its earthy atmosphere from the vaults beneath; at the far end a low, widely-opened door, beyond which lay the cloisters bathed in golden sunshine.

A young painter, sent for expressly to Rome, is engaged in restoring one of the frescoes with which the encircling walls are covered. He is bare-headed, and his short, crisp curls glance like gold when a ray of sunshine caresses them. On hearing footsteps he turns his deep-blue eyes towards the intruder. She stops short for a second, as if dazzled by the sunshine, then continues her way, slightly returning his low bow as she passes him, and gains the opposite door. She turns her head while opening it. The young man is gazing after her, unmistakable admiration in eyes and air. It lasts but a brief moment; but that moment is sufficient; Beatrice returns home, heart and head filled with an image that bears a strange likeness to the Angel Gabriel over the altar in the Del Nero chapel.

Standing there at her sun-lit window, Beatrice ran over every circumstance of that unexpected meeting, dwelling upon every particular, analysing each sensation, murmuring to herself that, till then, life had been an utter blank to her.

Some weeks earlier than her first sight of the painter, Nella had spoken of his arrival. But she had listened without a shadow of interest, and her visit to San Donato had been purely an accidental one. Since seeing him, however, she had questioned in apparently the most indifferent manner, and had learned that his name was Ugo, that he was a Trasteverino by birth, that he was talented, but poor.

Had Beatrice looked at Nella while speaking, she would have seen her colour deepen and her eyes seek the ground; which would certainly have led to more interrogation. But she never shifted her gaze from the vacancy which fancy was busy peopling, nor wondered at the extent of her attendant's information. Beatrice Del Nero never troubled her head about those whom she was pleased to consider beneath her.

The attendant's tongue resumed its silence; the mistress's dreams surged more sweetly than ever around her, and henceforth these dreams never left her, hovering around her by day, smiling upon her by night. But as a glass is shivered by a blow, so were those same dreams to be broken, and their iris-fragments strewn at her feet. For, from her window that glorious spring morning, she suddenly caught sight of what swept the sunshine from her heart, and, tornado-like, left desolation and destruction behind.

There, crossing the grass-plot at the end of the ilex avenue, were Nella and the young painter—slow their steps, head bent towards head, hand clasped in hand; their whole attitude the unmistakable one of declared lovers.

The sight smote her like a lightning flash, and indelibly branded upon her heart the image that time would otherwise probably have cancelled. Love leaped into life, no longer soft and smiling, but imperious, menacing, unpardoning. A fierce gasp, the futile fury of rosy nails striving to grave the agony of jealousy such as hers upon the senseless marble; then she turned from the window and with frightful calmness rang the bell.

"Go and seek Nella in the garden," she said to the grey-haired footman who answered her summons, "and send her to me at once."

The man bowed and turned to go. "At once, do you hear?" she repeated as the heavy portière fell behind him.

A minute or two later Nella entered the room.

The sun having risen higher, its golden glory no longer flooded the chamber; the Angora cat had sought his mistress's lap and lay there with half-open eyes and waving tail, extending and retracting his claws, as if he, too, had had a bitter awakening from some too flattering dream. A sudden chill seemed to have fallen. Only the chirp of the birds and the perfume of the flowers were there as before; faithful as hope and prayer in the shadow of adversity.

Nella has made her accustomed curtsey, has stepped up to her mistress's chair, and halted within a few paces.

The contrast between the two is a striking one. For Nella is fair,

with that fairness seldom to be found in Italy, and never out of it ; a transparency of skin and a delicacy of tint that would shame a sea-shell ; her features are soft and lovely, and there is a loving sadness in the depths of her hazel eyes that seldom misses the hearts of those upon whom they rest. Her dress is simplicity itself, but worn with a grace that many a high-born dame might envy.

Trouble rises in those large hazel eyes as they fall upon Beatrice's face. For she has had years of time and occasions unnumbered to study those patrician features, and she well knows what that tremulous twitch of nostril and mouth portends. She lays one of her hands upon the table beside her, as if to steady herself against the approaching storm. Thus she waits ; her heart beating as beats the heart of all who harbour a secret in their breasts and dread its discovery.

Her mistress seems to take a cruel pleasure in prolonging suspense ; for she sits there in silence, her eyes—after the one dark glance she had shot forth at Nella on her entrance—apparently fixed upon the now half-slumbering Angora ; her jewelled fingers grasping the elbows of her chair as if to restrain some impulse she was inwardly trying to master.

At last she speaks :

"Who was that man with you in the garden ?"

The reply dies upon Nella's lips—her face flushes painfully. Beatrice looks up and adds : "Are you not ashamed of yourself ?"

There is such a contemptuous insinuation in the tone as immediately to restore Nella's self-possession. With the courage of innocence she answers : "I was with Ugo Bernasconi, madam—but I have nothing to be ashamed of."

"Indeed ? And, pray, what is this Bernasconi to you ? How have you dared entice him into coming to court you under my very window ? Speak, girl."

"Ugo Bernasconi, madam, is my affianced husband. He came of his own free will—I never enticed him. If he has offended you by walking with me in the garden, he will make you his humble apologies, as I now make mine. It shall not happen again."

"No ; I will take care of that. It seems that you have been in a great hurry to affiance yourself. Your time has been but short."

"Love needs but little time to blossom in."

A spasm passed over Beatrice's face, and she pressed one hand convulsively over her heart.

"The fruit may turn out bitter enough," she said. "But of that later. Where have you met this man ?"

"At mass, first of all. After that in the street, on the ramparts—in many places."

"Yes, of course. You went wherever you could hope to meet him. Go on."

"Madam, I swear to you by the blessed Madonna that I did

nothing of the kind at first. Later on—after he had told me of his love and asked me to be his wife—I *did* try to see him as often as possible. Oh, if it was wrong, forgive it—think of my loneliness, of my never having known a father or a mother's love. Think of that, and rejoice rather that the poor foundling has met with an honest man to give her a name and a home. Madam—madam, do not be hard upon me! Do not be hard upon us!"

At Nella's last words a look, such as a demon might have owned to, flashed from Beatrice's eyes. But Nella saw it not; she was kneeling at her mistress's feet, her head bent in supplication, her heart oppressed with terrible foreboding.

"And you believe this stranger loves and intends to marry you? Poor fool!"

"I am sure of it. Words may lie—but not looks. I trust in Ugo as I trust in the saints above, God forgive me!"

"And you fancy he will be faithful to you? Turn from other women fairer than you, though fair you are? That after a few weeks' toying he will remember his vows and continue to be true? That he——" She broke suddenly off.

"I do," sobbed Nella.

Her utterance was choked; but there was the ring of faith in the words that struck Beatrice's heart with despair.

"And do you imagine you have the right to dispose of yourself thus to the first adventurer who seeks you? Do you owe us no gratitude?"

"Boundless gratitude, madam, to yourself and your noble parents for all those years of shelter and protection; but still——"

"But still?"

"I am but a poor, simple girl, and I yearn for someone to lean upon, to guide me. I have no claim upon you and yours; would you bid me refuse the offer of a heart and home for life?"

"Your ingratitude——"

"Oh, madam, do not say so! Heaven is my witness that I love and venerate the Count and Countess as they merit. The Holy Virgin can bear testimony to the prayers I have offered her to waken in your heart a little love for the poor dependant who nourishes in her breast so much for you!"

"Enough, girl. Go."

And, as she spoke, Beatrice wrenched her dress, which Nella in her emotion had grasped, from her hands.

Humbled and heartbroken the poor girl rose and left the room.

For nearly an hour Beatrice Del Nero remained sitting there, her black brows knit, and gleams of unholy light flashing forth now and again from under her dark lashes. Then suddenly the cloud lifted, and a strange smile stole over her haughty features. She rose, put on hood and mantle, and left the house.

Once more in the cloisters. The afternoon sun is falling full upon

the big black cross with its hammer and nails and crown of thorns—that it is a Capucin monastery—that towers in the centre of the little grass-grown enclosure; sombre sentinel, towards which the eyes of generations of monks must have turned as they paced round and round in their daily walk, their meditations dwelling upon the vanity of life save as a step to immortality; their hearts communing with Him who triumphed over the grave.

But when Beatrice entered there was nobody there but the painter, who at once descended from his ladder on becoming aware of her approach.

She walked straight up to him, greeted him with courtesy, and begged to be permitted to see his work. "I am Countess Beatrice of the Del Neros," she concluded, "and take great interest in all that pertains to art and artists."

Ugo bowed deferentially, while returning the smile that had accompanied her last words.

The restoration had been entrusted to no common hand, that was evident, for talent spoke from every stroke. But, better still, there was also an absence of all vanity; no aiming in the restorer to usurp the place of the restored, as is so often seen. After duly admiring his ability and progress, Beatrice said:

"I, too, paint a little, and should be grateful to you if you could find time to give me a few lessons during your stay here."

She stopped as she spoke, and gave a glance round the cloister walls. The frescoes were numerous, and all more or less in need of restoration. "So much the better!" she thought; "I shall have plenty of time." Though had there been the necessity, she would have found occupation for Ugo in the Palazzo gallery. But there would have been difficulty in keeping him and Nella apart for days together; whereas, for an hour's lesson, there would be little trouble in doing so. She gave a sigh for the good old times in which an ancestress of hers had starved a refractory servant to death, and whose spirit was declared still to haunt the scene of her sufferings. Had she been able, she would scarcely have scrupled to shut Nella up in one of the dungeons below till such time as Ugo should be ready to return to Rome. And then——?

"I shall be proud to do so," replied the flattered painter, his handsome face flushing with pleasure. "And you, madam, have only to choose the hour most convenient."

"I will let you know to-morrow; and I promise you to do my best to show myself a good pupil." The smile that accompanied the words might have turned any man's head.

They continued their walk round and round the cloisters, speaking of Rome and of art, with slow steps; and stopping from time to time to examine some figure or other on the blistered walls, while the shadow of the huge cross kept creeping slowly round towards the doorway, as if to warn the visitor to depart. She saw it not, however, and it

needed the iron tongue of the bell above to rouse her from the sort of waking dream in which she was wandering.

"So late already?" she cried. "It is time for me to go!"

But she stopped again at the door to thank the artist for his kindness in yielding thus readily to her wishes, adding: "It will be a real boon to me, for my life is but a lonely one; none to care for save the Count and Countess; none to——"

She did not finish the phrase; only smiled sadly. Then, with a gracious bend of her magnificent head, left him.

Ugo returned to his work. But he was restless and uncomfortable, and everything went wrong—colours, brushes, light.

"I had better give over for to-day," he murmured, laying his palette down on the low wall beside him; "I think I'll go for a walk." And, as he went, he repeated again and again: "What wonderful eyes! what wonderful eyes!"

But whether the eyes in question were those of the Sybil he had been re-touching, or of the lady who had just left him, must remain for ever undecided.

II.

WE must go back a few years.

An old Etruscan city, up amid the hills, with its massive old buildings of grey stone, its towers, its gloom and its torrent, which, after heavy rains, runs roaring past from the mountains above and rushes madly downwards to the plain, sweeping all before it in its tumultuous rage. A terrible torrent when aroused, and more feared than the broad river into which it finally falls; the mildest of streams in its normal state, and one in which children love to paddle, while their mothers, kneeling on the brink, beat their linen in measured cadence and sing a *stornello* in chorus.

This old Etruscan city is not a pleasant place, and, even down to the present day, the inhabitants are steeped in the strangest superstitions. It is breezy and bare, with scant vegetation and overabundant grey stone around. It is backed by hills, however, that geologists glory in, and from whose entrails the sickly, consumptive-looking population extract the alabaster from which they live.

An unusual excitement reigned in the little town. At the dreary street-corners, in the still drearier piazza, knots of twos and threes had gathered—women naturally predominating—and stood discussing with shrill voices and lively gestures an event that had taken place only an hour before. A sad event, too; for a woman and her baby had been swept away by the torrent, which a mountain storm had suddenly swollen, and had been whirled away out of sight and of all possibility of aid.

"Poor Maria!" said a woman, as she wiped her eyes upon the corner of her apron; "she was as good a Christian as ever breathed, in spite of that husband of hers."

"Hush! for Heaven's sake, or at least speak low; for, if Croginolo were to hear you, woe to your children and all belonging to you."

"Yes, indeed," chimed in a man, who had stopped to listen. "Only last week he threw a spell upon poor Martini, and his cow died the same night, and he took to his bed with the fever. Ah, Croginolo is an awful man!"

"Is he a man? I believe he is a demon, for——"

"No—a man he must be, for else he would not have loved his wife and child as he did. It'll be hard for him now, all alone in his hut down yonder."

"All alone? You jest! He is never alone; he has his spirits around him. *They* keep him company, I'll warrant."

"Like enough. But, with all his ugliness, he is useful at times, for he knows more than both the doctors put together, and can cure with his herbs what they cannot with all their drugs. Look at Battistino; *they* gave him over, and Croginolo set him on his legs again. Ah, he's a wonderful being! Where does he come from?"

"Can you tell? Nobody knows that. Two years ago he suddenly appeared among us with his wife, and built himself that hut of his."

"Poor baby! What a fate! And it was not christened either!"

"Bah! the devil will have his own, do what you will; and I say——"

The words died upon his lips and his face blanched; for round the corner of the dreary pile, that served as prison, penitentiary, and sundry other urban purposes, Croginolo himself appeared.

"Did he hear me, think you?" whispered the man who had spoken last.

"He can hear *everything* when he chooses," was the consoling reply.

Silence fell on the group, and they turned to watch the sorcerer.

His large head sunk upon his breast, his hump back and short though muscular form, did not ill correspond to the name of "Croginolo," the only one by which he was known, and which had been bestowed upon him either from his employment of a crucible at times, or from his supposed resemblance to that vessel. None exactly knew.

The Italians of the long past days of which I am writing were quite as fond of bestowing nicknames as are their modern descendants, and the choice of the same—then as now—generally evinces an acumen more logical than laudatory.

On he passed, watched by numberless curious eyes, showing outwardly little sign of the anguish that was gnawing within.

Years rolled on; the fate of the unhappy Maria and her babe ceased to be remembered. Croginolo continued to inhabit his hut outside the town, upon the bank of the fatal stream that had swept his all from heart and hearth; continued to supply soporifics and spells, furnish philters, listen to wrongs and dictate remedies, as the

case may be ; continued to be sought for in secret, and to be regarded by one and all as a *Fattucchiere* or necromancer, whose path it would be destruction—temporal and eternal—to cross. For in those days faith and fervency flourished in the land, and had not yet been trampled under foot by progress.

Yes—years rolled on. And then one day a woman, going to get a charm to cure a child upon whom the “evil eye” had fallen, found Croginolo’s hut roofless—four blackened stone walls with a heap of charred rubbish within—and no trace of the owner left behind.

Croginolo was seen no more.

III.

LONG and wide were Croginolo’s wanderings. Not vain, however, for, bereft of all though he was, he had still a purpose left in life. A dark purpose at best ; but, all things considered, not an unnatural one. And to this purpose all his faculties were now bent. It had been hugged through long years, caressed through countless sleepless nights. It had lain down with him, and, on his arising, had stood beside him. He had heard its voice mingling with the accents of his loving wife, had traced its whispers in the sounds that fell from his unconscious child’s innocent lips. *They* were gone for ever ; but it remained behind to goad him on with unceasing energy—scourging him till conscience herself cried out : “Why dost thou delay ?” And he repeated the question over and over again to himself, but could find no reply. Years ago he could have done what yet remained to do. Then, murmuring to himself, “The hour is come,” Croginolo turned his steps towards the city in which this tale opens.

Follow me.

An old dismantled tower, once part of a small fort, at a few minutes’ walk from the south gate of the town and surrounded by masses of fallen masonry so overgrown by briar and bramble as to render approach difficult. Perhaps also dangerous ; for serpents were said to infest the place, which, to this day, bears the name “Viper’s Hill,” and is even now shunned by truant schoolboys in their lawless rambles, as a place haunted by what it would be unsafe to meddle with.

Croginolo continued his trade—if trade it can be called—in that crazy old tower ; and whispers of the wonders worked by his agency would, from time to time, be breathed abroad—whispers that excited pleasurable horror in the breasts of listeners, and made them long to “touch with their own hand,” as they expressed it, one or another of the sorcerer’s secrets.

The sun was slowly sinking towards the mountain-range bounding the western horizon, and the bold crags and pine-fringed ridges were

showing in soft relief against the clear blue sky, when a woman in simple dark dress, and closely veiled, might have been seen making her way slowly up the narrow, tortuous path that passing feet had, little by little, frayed among the briars and rubbish by which Croginolo's tower was surrounded.

The "Fattucchiere" was sitting on a low stool upon the hearth, carefully superintending the simmering of a small vessel over the fire before him. His deformity was painfully apparent, but superstitious terror had greatly added to his ugliness. His face was *not* ugly, for the features were good and well-cut; it was only the strange mingling of inward pain and stern fixity of purpose gleaming forth from his eyes, with their bushy, overhanging brows, that at once startled and terrified. The expression of those eyes was that of a wounded animal about to spring upon its aggressor. That, his mysterious lore, and Italian observance of the cruel proverb, "Beware of those whom the Lord has marked," were reasons sufficient for Croginolo to be looked upon as something unholy and to be avoided.

With the exception of a shelf or two laden with strangely-shaped bottles and other vessels, the number of dried herbs suspended from the ceiling, and the animals dried, stuffed and skinned upon the walls, there was nothing in his dwelling that would not have been found in any peasant's home: a bed, a chest, a table, two or three stools and a little earthenware—that was all.

There was a tap at the door, to which Croginolo replied with an "avanti," but without removing his eyes from the brew he was tending; from time to time stirring the seething liquid with a long, curiously-shaped bone spoon, which might, possibly, once upon a time, have formed part of a human body.

The latch clicked, the hinges creaked, and the applicant entered. She paused within a pace or two of the door, and said: "Croginolo, I need your help. Will you give it me?"

A nod was the sole reply.

"Then listen to me. I want——"

He held up his left hand to command silence, then pointed to a stool near. She obeyed the gesture rapidly, for she felt faint and ill at ease. The herb-scented atmosphere was weighing upon her, causing every pulse to throb painfully, head and senses to reel. She leaned back against the wall and closed her eyes.

The silence was unbroken save by the bubble, bubble of the brew over which Croginolo was bending. Then all at once broken words began to fall from his lips, strange, short, unintelligible, yet not without a sort of rhythm. They fell confusedly upon the woman's ear as she leant there—now sounding close to her, now seeming to float up from a long, weary distance. Was it an incantation, or was the man only muttering to himself in an unknown tongue? She tried hard to make it out, but to no purpose. She felt herself sinking—sinking—sinking—then came a blank.

A pungent odour from the pot filling the room, and, like Aaron's rod, swallowing up all before it, brought her to herself. Croginolo was standing before her with a little glass in his hand. "The herbs," he said; "drink this; it will do you good."

Unhesitatingly she obeyed. The effect was marvellous. Like mist before the breeze, all haziness was swept away; she sat up with a feeling as if a new life had been infused into her.

"And now, Countess Beatrice," said Croginolo, seating himself opposite, "let me hear in what way I can be of service to you."

"You know me, then?"

"Who does not know Countess Beatrice Del Nero? Besides, would any but you have drunk unhesitatingly the glass offered by one like me? Your blood has not degenerated." Then, after an instant's pause, he added: "In that, at least."

The emphasis was slight, but it caused Beatrice to look at him with surprise. She scanned his face with something of bewilderment in her own. Then: "And you know what has brought me here?" she asked in a low tone.

"Perfectly. But I must also hear it from your own lips."

"And what I want of you?"

"I was preparing it when you entered."

Beatrice gazed at him in amazement. Not in fear, however; she was a true Del Nero. She paused for a moment, but only for a moment; then began, in a voice that never trembled nor betrayed her to the end:

"I will be brief—words to one like you are needless. I have sought the love of the only man who ever touched my heart, and sought in vain. You seem to know the Del Neros. Well, the last of that haughty race—your sneer was a legitimate one: it did not escape me—has had her advances looked coldly on by one who is as far below her in birth and position as the gleam of your coals there is inferior to the light of the sun. Ah, could I ever have believed that what began in caprice would end in passion—passion such as the fire they say once burned in yonder mountains—could I ever have dreamed it, I say, I would have fled to the ends of the earth. I have flung down every barrier that prejudice sets up, have told him my love in action, in look, in all but word, and have met with naught but cold courtesy when I looked for love."

She rose and paced the little room like a wild animal in its cage—her eyes flashing, her bosom heaving.

"Croginolo," she continued, halting before him suddenly, "I hate myself for what I have done; I would trample on myself as I have trampled on pride, and yet I cannot—cannot—cannot break my chain. Croginolo, they say your art is a mighty one—you must bring him to my feet. I am rich—ask what you will, you——"

"And your rival?"

She started as if an adder had stung her.

"Ha, you know that too, do you? That the maid has been preferred to the mistress. But no matter, I shall know how to deal with her. Bah! I could forgive her even, could I but win Ugo's love."

Her voice softened wonderfully as she spoke the last words.

Crogino looked at her wondering. "Forgive?"

"Yes; we can forgive at times, but not forget. No Del Nero ever yet forgot friend or foe. Now help me."

Crogino rose in silence, and, taking a phial from the shelf, filled it with the liquid he had been brewing. It was tepid still, and, opal-like, varied its hue at every motion.

"There, madam, administer it with your own hand—let him drink it in your presence—your eyes fixed on his, and you will see him at your feet, weak, as he is now strong, with neither word nor will of his own more."

"And when——?"

"The effect is immediate."

"Thanks—my most heartfelt thanks."

She slipped a purse into his hand and turned to go.

"Your own hand, remember," cried Crogino, as she crossed the threshold.

She bent her head in assent, and hurried on her way without turning again. Had she looked back she would have seen Crogino empty the purse she had given him into his hand and fling the gold pieces down into the old well by the door. The purse itself, however, he carefully placed in his bosom after having examined it attentively; the badge of the Del Nero family—a rampant lion—was embroidered upon it.

"At last!" he muttered, as he re-entered the tower and closed the door behind him.

Darkness was fast falling when Beatrice reached the little private door of the garden. Shadows were deepening in corners, whence they gradually crept forth like sombre spirits from their tomb, and the whole stretch of garden wall lay in deep shade, thickened into gloom almost, where the overhanging trees stretched forth their leafy arms. But, familiar as she was with every step of the way, she never slackened her pace. She had nearly reached the door when a man stepped forth from out of the gloom, almost as if to bar her path. The figure advanced; she stopped; and, in the waning light, she recognised Ugo. Her heart gave a great bound, then stood still, while she felt a torrent of blood rush to her cheeks.

"La Signora Contessa!" said the painter, as he doffed his cap and bent before her. Then he stood silent, as if waiting for her to speak.

For a moment she felt bewildered by the tumult of thoughts that assailed her brain; but quickly the old Del Nero blood asserted itself, and she spoke out boldly, clearly, plainly. How it came, she

neither knew nor cared. Like a long-pent flood the words burst from her lips, as if dictated by some power within that brooked no resistance; spoke with the eloquence passion such as hers never fails to lend; laid open heart and soul to the bewildered man before her—unreservedly, queen-like, offering hand and heart, lands and wealth to the man whose position was too far removed from her own to permit of his ever taking the initiative. Hiding nothing, but laying bare the whole history, the pique that commenced, the passion that concluded it, from the hour of their first meeting down to the actual moment.

"And here," she concluded, taking the phial from her bosom and holding it up where the pale rays of the rising moon could reach it, "here is what was to give me your love and assure my happiness. Bestow it upon me freely; I will not trick you into loving, now that I have told you all; fling other thoughts from you as I fling this potion!"—she hurled it against the wall as she spoke, and the ring of shivered glass told of its destruction. "Give your heart to me, as I have given you mine; it will be in good keeping. Beatrice dei Del Nero begs it as a boon."

She flung herself at his feet in a passionate burst of tears.

The young painter was deeply moved. He would have been unworthy the name of man had he not been so. Gently he raised the weeping woman and led her to the stone bench beside the little door. The rising moon was just showing itself through the boughs of the trees opposite. The pale rays fell upon Beatrice's face—tear-stained and white as marble, the dark eyes glistening upon her heaving bosom and tightly-clasped hands.

Ugo stood beside her, his head bent, his heart troubled. He had never, even from the first, been blind to her partiality; but had set it down to mere caprice, to an idle woman's whim, and had fancied that, meeting with no encouragement on his part, it would speedily die out of itself. And now, what was the affianced of another to reply? There was no hesitation of heart; but to school his tongue to the fitting words was a hard matter. Even as he stood there, the image of his gentle Nella, whom, in spite of her mistress's vigilance, he contrived to see from time to time, rose before him with her dove-like eyes and her sweet smile, and from it he invoked aid in his perplexity.

And it came. Gently, as a loving brother might have done, with a woman's tact almost, Ugo said what he could to soothe her, dwelt upon the difference of rank between them, upon everything he could think of to comfort and console her. Did he succeed? He could not tell; for, while he spoke, she pulled down her veil; and, when he had ended, she rose to go.

Taking out the key, she unlocked the door, and left him without a word.

IV.

SOME weeks have passed, and, outwardly, things are going on smoothly enough. Beatrice is much what she was before the painter's name had ever been heard in the place, and has restored Nella to full liberty; Ugo is busy from dawn to dusk with his frescoes, in order to get them finished for the grand festival now drawing near; the little gossip that had oozed abroad in regard to the Contessa Beatrice's tenderness towards the young artist has died out for want of aliment, and even Croginolo, with all his ability, has been unable to gather anything further upon which to build his theories.

It is the Friday before the Festival, which is to take place on Sunday.

Abutting into the cemetery beyond the cloister, and stuck on to the old church like a limpet to a rock, was a small chapel belonging to the Del Neros, and the burial-place of many generations of the family. It could be entered from the church itself only, but was lighted by three little windows looking into the graveyard; and one who cared to gaze through the iron grating of the same could descry, athwart the gloom, the dust and decay of centuries of human grandeur. Coffins upon trestles ranged around, their gilt mouldings crumbling, coats of arms all but colourless, coronets battered and bent; banners reduced to mere strips of faded silk that fluttered at every breath of wind that wandered in through the barred windows; a wholesome lesson read by many, though profited by few; while none could have told what Croginolo used to read during his long hours of leaning there in contemplation of the dead Del Neros.

The cemetery had been put in order for the festival, and, on that Friday, after giving a look round the church, whose toilette was in full progress, Beatrice entered to see what had also been done for the dead. After wandering through the maze of monuments and mounds, chaplets and crosses, she reached the spot in which her fathers lay sleeping, and was not a little surprised by coming suddenly upon Croginolo sitting in the shade of one of the four cypresses that overshadowed the little building. Her first impulse was to retreat; but, on second thoughts, she stayed. Croginolo rose and bent before her.

"It is some time since we met, Signora Contessa. I had hoped that, after your first visit, I should have been honoured with a second. This seat is not a soft one," he continued, brushing aside some withered leaves from a low tomb as he spoke, "but there are worse in the world. Your Excellency looks somewhat pale. Tired, no doubt, for the sun is hot."

Beatrice assented, and was about to seat herself on a simple slab close beside her, when Croginolo suddenly started forward with a cry of "Not there, not there!" and stretched out his hand as if he would

have hindered her. "There is better shade here," he added more calmly; "you will be cooler here."

It was true, and so she did his bidding. She turned, however, to read the inscription on the other tomb. It was short enough: "Gasparo Saraceno," followed by a date.

Croginolo noted the act, and, while reseating himself in his old place said: "Yes, that is but a poor grave for a Saraceno, is it not? But fate was cruel to the race—cruel through many a past generation."

"You know their history then?"

"Who does not? The hereditary foes of the Del Neros!"

"The family is extinct now?"

"People say so. And all the better, too."

"Why?"

"What would you? Broken and crushed as they were, is it not better that they should vanish from the face of the earth? Why, do you know that the sister of the very Gasparo Saraceno lying there died all but in want?"

"No, I did not. Had she none to help her?"

"None of her own kin; she would not have accepted aid from others."

"Poor woman! Where did she die?"

"Far from here, Signora; in a little town high up among the hills."

"Did you know her?"

A fit of coughing hindered an immediate reply. "Yes," he at length answered in a thick voice, "and a better woman never breathed."

"I wish I had known her also. I——"

"You?"

The tone was so strange that Beatrice looked at him in surprise.

"Had she no other relations?" she asked.

"None."

"Was she married?"

Croginolo's cough seized him again. He buried his face in his blue cotton handkerchief and could only nod in reply.

"And her husband also was poor?"

Another nod.

"If I had known it——"

"What could you have done? *You* may have forgotten the long and bitter feud that for centuries existed between your family and theirs; but do you suppose that they, spoiled of all they once possessed by the triumphant Del Neros, could accept alms from any of your blood and name? Never! For they were noble as yourselves—though the last of their race lies there in a peasant's grave, while the Del Neros are housed in state, within a few feet of his lowly bed."

There was a vehemence in voice and air that startled his listener. He perceived it,

"Pardon me," he said, in milder tone. "The injustice of the world in general fires my blood. Forgive my petulance."

"I have heard my father himself say that we were hard——"

"Hard! Hard to strip the last remnant from a perishing race—the roof from an aged head—the bed from young and tender limbs! Hard!"

"But they did owe my grandfather the money?"

"Yes. But how? He purposely bought up the claims of others. Why? To ruin outright the race hated so long."

"But——"

"Bah! Justice—human justice—is a mockery; forbearance, at times, a crime."

Croginolo was terribly agitated. The perspiration hung in large beads upon his brow. Beatrice looked at him without any particular feeling of wonder. Party spirit was violent in those days, and the adherents of rival houses were continually at wordy war with each other. Sometimes, even, swords were still drawn and blood made to flow. So she waited a moment to let him grow cool, and then, to change the conversation, asked him what was the particular virtue of the little bundle of herbs lying beside him, and which had evidently been recently gathered and carefully tied up.

Croginolo looked across at her with a strange expression in his eyes; and, after a moment's silence, said:

"Lady, you are fond of herb-lore, and yet you fling away its choicest gifts."

Beatrice flushed crimson.

"That, too," she cried—"that, too!"

"Ah, my art would be a poor one if it taught me nothing deeper."

"Could he have followed me?" she thought. "And if he did, he must have heard." And once more the crimson flood dyed her cheeks.

Croginolo's eyes, with their strange intensity, never swerved from her face. He must have read her thoughts, for he said:

"My spirit is free as the bird floating overhead yonder. Will is motion with me, when I so order it. Distance exists not for those who have mastered secrets such as I have. Space unbounded shrinks into naught. But enough. You asked what this herb is. I will tell you. Listen. In a far-off land, where the sun overhead glows like liquid fire, and the earth beneath scorches the feet of those that walk upon it, men's hearts have learned to burn with passions to which those of colder spots are but as snow in comparison. They love and hate, yonder, with the force and fury of the tiger, and spare neither life nor limb of such as may cross their path. Do you follow me?"

Beatrice bowed her head in assent.

"And in that fire-fed land are to be found those—few in number, indeed—whose days and nights, from birth to burial almost, have been spent in the study of Nature's mysteries. And one of them—a woman like yourself—groping among the dark secrets revealed but

to the chosen few, unearthed one that, for long centuries, had lain lost in the womb of the past. That secret lies hidden in the herb before you."

"And is——"

"A power, in skilled hands, to crush both body and soul——"

"To——"

"Listen. With juices drawn from this, I can wither up the softest flesh and make it loathsome to the sight; can dim the brightest intellect, and render it null as the drivelling of the idiot; can reach the spring of life itself and annihilate it at a blow!"

He paused, and Beatrice shivered from head to foot under the joint influence of those terrible words and that relentless gaze.

"And who would ever dream that all that—and more yet—could lie hidden under a simple stem and a few green leaves?"

He held the plant out to her as he spoke. She shrank back instinctively.

"Ah! it repulses you, does it? I thought a Del Nero was proof against all weakness of that sort. The woman who discovered the secret was of stronger fibre; she——"

"What of her? What became of her?"

"Oh! her end was a bad one—most innovators *do* end badly. She was broken on the wheel at Rome."

"How horrible! And why?"

"For dispensing her discovery too freely among such great ladies as had a rival to get rid of."

"And the plant grows here?"

"I gathered it from Gasparo Saraceno's grave."

Again a shudder—she knew not why—passed through Beatrice's frame. She rose to go. "Thanks for your tale;" and, with a bend of her stately head, she left him.

"A rivederci, Signora Contessa," said Crogino, as he placed the plant carefully in his bosom.

V.

THE long service was over at last, and the grand old church was sending forth through her portals a tide of humanity, while the magnificent organ poured out a flood of harmony over the passing heads. Wave after wave of sound pealed through the stately aisles, and wreaths of incense curled upwards to disperse and be lost amid the scroll-work of the roof. Walls and pillars gleamed in purple and gold, causing the pictures to loom darkly down from their richly gilded frames. The luxury of religion shone forth from all around, and, at the far end of the building, arrayed in its most gorgeous robes, the High Altar shimmered and shone like some wondrous constellation from above.

Slowly the crowd surged forth from the golden haze within, into

God's glorious sunshine without, dispersing in every direction to seek rest and refreshment, so as to enjoy to the full the procession which was to leave the church at three. The bells overhead clanged forth the hour of noon ; the bells of distant churches pealed in response ; the air was filled with vibration that found echo in the breasts of the multitude, and, for a moment at least, bore their thoughts aloft and taught them to soar above the petty cares of everyday life.

But the duration was brief, for ere the throng had melted away in twos and threes, the brazen tongues suddenly ceased their song, and silence once more fell upon the city.

But also, long ere three had struck, the throng was once more gathered there ; pushing, elbowing, jostling, now swaying to one side, now to the other, all eager-eyed, and struggling to get into the foremost row. But when three o'clock boomed forth from above, silence fell upon the multitude also, and each unit remained motionless in its place as if suddenly rooted to the spot. Then the wide portals silently turned upon their hinges and the procession came forth.

Six priests clad in white, two by two ; then a number of children dressed as angels, and scattering flowers as they passed, pouring forth like a stream of many-hued butterflies, and on the priests at the head giving the signal, bursting into a chorus of clear, shrill trebles that made the whole Piazza ring again. Then came a huge crucifix borne aloft, followed by more priests and by a confraternity clad in scarlet robes ; then another smaller but richer crucifix and a confraternity in white robes, priests again, and a train of boys swinging silver censers ; then a gorgeous canopy, all purple and gold, borne on the shoulders of four stout men, and beneath which, magnificently robed, a life-sized image of San Donato tottered and trembled at every step taken by its bearers ; then any number of priests ; and lastly another confraternity—the Misericordia—in their black robes, and with hideous hoods over their faces, through the two holes of which their eyes glared forth upon the crowd.

Slowly and solemnly the procession made the tour of the Piazza between two closely-packed hedges of eager gazers, amid bursts of choral music, clouds of incense, and showers of flowers from the balconies and windows above, thickly lined with spectators, and richly draped in silk and satin of every colour. On it wound, the children's shrill treble responding to the deep bass of the priests ; on, on, on, the wreaths of incense floating overhead, the hum of the multitude sounding around ; on, on, on, till, turning down the Via del Seminario, it slowly wound out of sight.

It could scarcely have been chance that brought Nella and Ugo together at the corner of the Piazza close to the hideous old fountain. Be it as it may, however, meet they did, and, after a greeting, and a look that told a great deal more, turned down the little street leading to the bastions, and there seated themselves on one of the benches under the secular elms.

It was a pleasant change after the heat, the dragging and the buffetting of the crowd. Not a soul was in sight, and they might have fancied themselves on a desert island, had it not been for the occasional breath of melody borne to their ears by the soft summer wind. There they sat, hand in hand, gazing into each other's eyes—in a little world all their own—happy in the present, hopeful for the future.

The first mutual greetings are over, and their tongues have strayed away to others besides themselves. After a short pause, Ugo says :

"And you love her so dearly, *anima mia* ?"

"I do indeed. What should I be if I didn't? A wretch. Did not her father and mother take pity on me that morning when I was found, a helpless babe, on the bench beside the Palazzo gate?"

"My poor Nella!"

"None knew who I was, or whence I came. Some boys passing had seen a man going that way—a man in a carter's cloak. He had gone straight up to the bench, laid a bundle down upon it, and knocked. Then he ran away. That is all we know. That bundle was your Nella, Ugo; and would you have me not love the daughter of those who have given me shelter and bread from that day to this?"

"No, no, darling. I was wrong to ask the question."

"And then, you know, she is not just what she seems—haughty and wilful, yes, impatient of control; that is why she was so miserable with her husband; it was well he died so soon—well for both. For there was no love in their marriage—only a made-up thing, and——"

"All unlike ours, dearest."

"Yes, indeed! Ah, believe me, she has had much to bear. We must love her all the more for it. But it hurts me so to see her so cold and careless towards me now! Of course, I know! There, I am always forgetting. Well, I would give years of my life to make her love me just a little. I am sure that she, too, would be the happier for it."

"Surely she would."

A burst of nearer music and the faint odour of incense warned them that the procession was returning.

"Holy Virgin! Already? Ugo, I must go!"

They rose, and, standing there, cast a hurried glance around. Not a soul in sight—nothing stirring, save the chequered shadows falling upon them from the boughs above. An instant's hesitation—another look—then their lips meet in a farewell kiss, and Nella hurries away down the shady avenue.

The four-beaked silver lamp was shedding its mellow light on all around in Beatrice's chamber, and upon herself also, as, tired with that day's walk, she lay back in an armchair drawn close to the table. It was near eleven, and Nella had relieved her of her dress, and let down the dark coils of her magnificent hair to fall in heavy masses upon the white garment in which she was wrapped.

There was a triumphant light in her gleaming eyes as she followed Nella's movements, and an expression around the thin lips that told of a resolution taken, and the intention of carrying it out. But Nella saw none of this, and quietly continued her duties of the hour. These accomplished, she came up to the table and exclaimed:

"Oh, madam, what a quaint little bottle! I never have seen it before."

For Beatrice was toying with and caressing an antique two-necked phial, some three parts filled with a pale green fluid that shot forth strangely vivid rays as the light of the lamp fell upon it. It was almost as if an evil spirit imprisoned within were struggling to escape.

"Is it a new perfume, perhaps?" asked Nella.

"No, my Nella, something better—an elixir—a philter—what you will, a few drops of which can quench hate for ever, and render peace to the most stubborn heart. Have you a mind to try it?"

"I, madam?"

"Yes, you, silly girl. But no; I forgot. Your love is running on as smoothly as the brook to the sea—no storm to ruffle it, no darkness to cloud. For your lover is a fond one, Nella—is he not?—and suns himself in the light of your eyes and worships your pretty face—for pretty it is. But, tell me, were you to lose your beauty, were the light of your eyes to grow dim, do you think that he who has taught you to call him yours would remain true to his vows? Poor child! You little know what men really are."

There was mockery in her tone, while her eyes never left the phial she was idly toying with.

"Nay, madam, I fear nothing. I have nothing to fear. Ugo would be true to me were I to become ugly and loathsome."

"Don't boast, girl, don't boast. There are evil powers abroad; do you not know it?—evil powers ever on the watch to catch at words and entrap souls in their own meshes. Think rather——"

"I fear no evil powers, madam. I pray daily to heaven to protect me and my Ugo; to bless you and yours, and I strive to do my duty. I trust to heaven to hear me."

"Well, who knows? Time will tell. Now go, and pray that your lover may be true to you to the end. There, that will do—go, I say!"

For Nella, according to custom, had knelt to kiss her mistress's hand ere leaving her; but Beatrice had roughly drawn her hand away.

"There, place this in the cabinet in the next room," she continued, holding out the phial, "and beware of breaking it!"

Nella retired, with a wounded heart and brimming eyes. She was of a soft, clinging disposition, and kindness was as essential to her as the air she breathed.

The portière fell, and Beatrice was left alone.

Her eyes had followed the girl as she left the room; they now remained fixed upon the drapery behind which she had disappeared.

The gleam of triumph was fiercer than ever, and there was cruel mockery in her voice, as she murmured half aloud: "To-morrow—to-morrow—to-morrow! We shall see then how Ugo's constancy will bear the test."

For a while she sat on, the fevered thoughts within flinging lights and shadows upon her face, as do clouds floating over brooding water. Then, at last, she rose with a shiver and sought her bed.

"One would suppose I had tasted of Croginolo's brewing," she murmured; "my head is so hot and my limbs so chill. Did he not tell me to-day that such are the first symptoms? Well, no matter; to-morrow I shall see for myself."

She laid her head upon her pillow, and shortly afterwards fell asleep.

The next day, towards noon, Croginolo might have been seen sitting upon the crest of the low ridge that runs, rampart-like, at about three-quarters of a mile distance from the town. From his seat—a mass of grey lava cropping up amid a wilderness of rosemary, myrtle and southernwood, among which gaudy tufts of yellow arnica and crimson mountain pinks were blooming—he had a full view of the Del Nero Palazzo and its gardens lying below and steeped in all the glory of cloudless sunshine.

With elbows resting upon knees; head upon hands; eyes fixed as if in a dream upon the dark red pile, with its long rows of windows; motionless, hardly seeming to breathe, he had less the semblance of a human being than of some gnome come forth from one of the long-abandoned mines in the mountains above to gaze upon the sun-lit world and wonder at the works of his arch-enemy and rival—man.

How long he had sat there, he himself could not have said. Perhaps the spotted snake, that, coiled up in a tuft of hellebore, lay watching him with unblinking eyes, knew; for he had noted his coming; had heard the muttered curse; marked the menacing gesture flung across the intervening space to the city below, and lay there watching still, waiting for what would follow.

The noonday bells sounded; and as their brazen notes floated upwards, quick and quicker, loud and louder, the light in Croginolo's eyes brightened to a baleful glare, not unlike that shot forth by the reptile near him.

And broken words fell from his parching lips—swift and searing phrases—such as the lightning that had scathed the tree that flung its skeleton arms above his head.

"She must have done it by now. The last of that hated house is lost, henceforth dishonoured and scorned—poor Nella! I grieve for her; but the dead cried for vengeance; I hearkened and obeyed. Heaven itself cuts down the guiltless to get at the guilty—poor Nella! but that cursed race brings evil to all around! What evil have they not brought upon me and mine; upon you—my lost wife—my Maria—my poor Gasparo! Ah, if my child had been left me, I should have had something to live for! But now, what I have

brooded over and hugged for years has come—come at last Revenge is holding festival yonder; the Saracenos can henceforth sleep in peace. What matter if I——”

There was a step among the herbs, and the next moment an old woman, dressed in rags, broke through the bushes. Throwing down her bundle of sticks, she seated herself upon the rock, next to Croginolo, and drew a deep breath.

“Ah, maestro, gathering simples as usual?”

Croginolo nodded, but never turned his gaze from the Del Nero pile, with its gardens and its grandeur slumbering in the summer loveliness, as if perplexity and pain could find no entrance there.

“Ah, yes, you are looking at the palazzo yonder. It's a fine place, they tell me—a mighty fine place—full of all that heart can desire. Ah, me, the rich must have a fine time of it! All they wish for—nothing to fret at! But it's a weary world for the poor—a weary, weary world; and a poor, lone old creature like me—for I've none left me, not one, all, all gone. Ah, if we had but kept the child that my husband—bless his soul—left at the Del Nero door, I should have someone to work for me now—Nella, you know. How often we used to talk over it all. We never told anybody, for my Nino feared he might get into trouble. He's gone—God help me—so I can talk now. ‘Ah, Silvia,’ he used to say—my name is Silvia—‘when I saw the poor babe lying there by the dead woman, half covered with sand’—for you know——”

She broke off abruptly, for Croginolo had turned to gaze upon her with an expression that was terrible to see.

“What are you raving about, woman? What——”

“I am only telling you the story of what happened to my poor Nino. I've never told it to anyone. That Nella at the palazzo yonder—Nino found her——”

“But what woman was found half buried in the sand? Where? When?” He seized her arm as he spoke, and shook her.

“Listen, maestro. Let go my arm—I will tell you all about it. A long while ago—maybe twenty years or so—near Borgonuovo—some miles below Altopiano. It's a good stretch from here, but my old man was a carter, and used to run the road weekly from here, and earned a good bit of money, too. And I had no need then to go to the hills for wood, for——”

“The woman—the woman—the child?”

“Yes, yes, I'm coming to them in good time! Don't flurry me! Well, then, my old man was coming back with a goodly load, but slowly, for the roads were bad, and there had just been one of those terrible floods that come down from Altopiano without any warning and overflow the plain. They say that——”

“Woman,” shrieked Croginolo, “to your tale—to your tale!” And he ground his teeth in excitement.

Terrified at his wildness, the old woman hurriedly went on:

"As he was coming along he thought he would go and see if the river had returned to its bed; so he left his horse and cart in the road, and crossed the field, ankle-deep in mud and dirt, and there, what should he come upon but a woman half buried in the sand—her staring eyes fixed on the sky and a living baby clasped tightly to her breast! Nino nearly fell down at the sight. Ah, it was heart-breaking, and I don't wonder at your being moved!"

Croginolo had risen and was standing before the old woman; his face blanched, every feature working, his eyes starting from his head.

"And then?" He could get out no more.

"Yes, I'm going to tell you. But don't glare at me like that; you make my blood run cold."

He signed to her to continue.

"So my good man looked round to see if anybody was by; but not a soul was to be seen. So he got the babe out of its mother's arms—he could hardly do it, they were so stiff and so tightly clasped, whipped it into his cloak, and back to his cart as if Satan had been behind him. And when he got home, weary as we were, we sat up the livelong night talking over what was best to be done. Ah, it was such a love of a babe!"

Croginolo gave a gasping sob.

"So we decided to leave it at the Del Neros' door, and Nino——"

"And there was no mark? No name?"

For a moment the old woman remained silent; then, after fumbling in her bosom, said, "Yes, there was this." And she handed him a little silver medal of the Madonna.

Croginolo snatched it as a famishing man snatches at bread. His legs were trembling under him—his eyes were veiled by suppressed emotion. He passed his hand over them to clear their sight, and then—— A cry, such as only a heart on the brink of breaking can give, burst from his lips. Deeply scratched into the metal he read: "Maria Saraceno."

"My wife! My child!" he wailed, and flung himself in agony upon the earth. He had recognised the medal that, but a few days before her death, his wife had hung about her child's neck.

At the same instant a passing cloud suddenly flung a dark shadow over the Palazzo Del Nero. And as suddenly Croginolo awoke to the present. Starting up with a shriek of "My child! My child! I have killed my child!" he dashed frantically down the declivity and disappeared among the brushwood.

* * * * *

We must go back for an hour or two. Beatrice Del Nero has passed a restless night—sleeplessness alternating with snatches of slumber peopled with horrible dreams. But with the morning light she has grown calmer and has slept heavily. Twice Nella has stolen softly into the darkened chamber, and twice she has left it again after listening for a moment to her mistress's deep breathing. But

on her third entry the heavy drapery has been drawn aside and Beatrice's dark tresses and gleaming eyes are dimly visible within the shadow of the alcove.

"What hour is it, Nella?"

"Just upon noon, madame, and——"

"Noon? My coffee, girl, quick, for I have that to do which brooks no delay."

She sank upon her pillows, murmuring to herself: "He told me between noonday and one was the most auspicious hour. Well, I have still time in plenty, and then——" She closed her eyes and abandoned herself to the visions that surged up from the depths of her soul, while Nella hastily left the chamber to do her mistress's bidding.

The poor girl's heart was full of grief, for she yearned sadly for a little goodwill and affection from her whom duty and gratitude had taught her to love. Tears gathered in her eyes as she took up the silver tray with its little coffee-pot and cup. She set it down again to wipe away the dimness that veiled her sight, and, while doing so, her looks fell upon the cabinet in which, by her mistress's command, she had placed the phial the evening before. A sudden thought struck her. Should she? Could she dare? For a moment she hesitated; then with trembling hand turned the key, drew forth the philter, and, removing one of the stoppers, let a few drops of the liquid fall into the coffee-pot. But, terrified at what she had done, she hurriedly replaced the phial, and, taking up the pot, was about to empty its contents in the garden below, when Beatrice's voice, harder and more imperious than ever, reached her, and made her hurry to obey the summons.

"What do you mean by keeping me waiting like this? You are getting more careless every day. There, give me the cup!"

Nella obeyed in trembling; she would have spoken, but the words died in utterance. Before she could recover herself, the cup had been drained.

"Now, my wrapper." She rose, and seating herself before the glass, motioned Nella to begin her duties.

Her long hair has fallen like a dusky cloud upon the snowy mantle that enfolds her, as, leaning back in her chair, she toys idly with the crimson tassels of her girdle. She looks like a queen, and, from time to time, smiles at the reflection of her regal beauty in the mirror opposite. The visions have followed her; they crowd around her, some rosy as the summer dawn, others black as wintry midnight; and their lights and shadows play upon her features in ceaseless succession. But a little more and the first terrible step will have been taken; the step that is finally to lead to all that her heart covets. Yes, the cost is a dark one, but what Del Nero ever had stayed to count the cost of a caprice even? With no longer a rival at his side, could Ugo resist the spell of a beauty such as she saw mirrored

before her? Never, never! And then she resolutely fixed her eyes upon the smiling future and resolved once more to cross unshrinkingly the dark present that alone barred her entrance to it. She fixed her eyes upon a smiling land far from the dark spot that held her now. The land in which her life would be brightened by Ugo's love, and upon which no shadow from memory or remorse should be suffered to fall. She saw herself Ugo's wife, leaning upon his stout arm, his eyes gazing fondly into hers, the spreading palms swaying softly in the perfume-laden air, a sapphire sky above their heads, an azure sea stretching at their feet; she felt his breath upon her cheek, heard the murmur of his voice mingling with the whisper of the dreamy waters to the silvery sands.

The thud of a succession of frantic blows upon the portal of the palazzo put all else to flight. The strokes reverberated through the building, causing all to start in amaze, and listen. The blows suddenly cease—a pause—confused voices in the adjacent room, hurried steps, a scuffle. The portière is violently torn aside, and Croginolo, wild, haggard, terrible to look at, bursts into the room. The Count and Countess follow him, while a group of eager, wondering servants gather round the door.

Heedless of all else, Croginolo rushed up to the startled Nella, seized her by the arm, and, in accents such as none who heard could ever forget, cried: "Have you drunk it? Am I too late? Speak, speak!" He shook her in his anguish, and his voice rose almost to a shriek as he repeated, "Speak, speak, I tell you!"

"Drink what? I have drunk nothing—I——"

"The philter, the drug that yon cursed woman bought to destroy you," and, as he spoke, he drew from his breast the purse into which he had put the price of the second draught, and flung it at Beatrice's feet.

Nella gazed in terror and bewilderment from Croginolo to her mistress. Then the terrible truth broke upon her, and, with a wild cry, she freed herself from the man's grasp and flung herself at Beatrice's feet, wailing forth, with clasped hands and agonized features: "I have killed her! I have killed her!"

Beatrice, who had risen, had been standing gazing upon the scene with angry, haughty wonderment; but, at the kneeling girl's words, a sudden horror broke over her features.

"What do you mean?" she hissed forth, grasping Nella's shoulder with a grip of steel. "What have you done? Whom have you killed?"

"Mistress—oh, my mistress, pardon—pardon! I thought to waken in your heart the kindness I so pined for—I thought—God help me! God help me! But,"—and here she shook off Beatrice's hand and sprang to her feet—"but you told me it was innocent; why did you do that? For whom then did you get the poison?"

All in the room drew a step nearer.

"Oh," cried Nella, turning to Croginolo with outstretched arms,

and hands clasped in entreaty, "unsay your words! Say that the draught was innocent—the draught these hands poured into my mistress's cup! Unsay it—unsay it!"

Croginolo shook his head. "I cannot," he said in a low tone; "the drug is fatal, and has no antidote."

A cry like that of a wild beast broke from Beatrice's lips. She made a spring forward as would a tiger towards its prey, then suddenly staggered, while a terrible change passed over her features, as if life were being sucked out of them from within, with shiverings such as caused the pearly teeth to chatter audibly.

With a cry the Count and Countess rushed forward just in time to save their daughter from falling. "A doctor—a doctor," they cried in terror.

"No doctor can avail," said Croginolo. "The drug is fatal."

Without exactly knowing why, two men of the group of servants at the door stepped forward and seized upon Croginolo. But their violence was needless, for he made no attempt to escape. There he stood, gazing at Nella, while the big tears rolled slowly down his pale cheeks, murmuring:

"Saved, saved, saved!"

And there stood his long-lost child, the babe whom he had thought never to see again. And now?

There was the sound of measured footsteps in the chamber without—the clash of arms—the portière is lifted, and an officer of the police, whom one of the servants, unbidden, had run to fetch, enters.

A strange and terrible sight met his gaze. Beatrice lying back in the same chair in which so lately she had been smiling at the reflection of her beauty in the mirror and indulging in her golden dreams; her stern father on one side, her weeping mother on the other. But no longer the Beatrice of the past; Beatrice del Nero still, but now horrible to look upon, her face all drawn and wrinkled, fallen in, with ghastly white patches, hideous blots spreading over the skin, her form shaken every moment by a shiver assailing her from head to foot. In mercy to herself, they had turned her chair away from the mirror. Nella crouching on the ground before her, covering her face with her hands, as if to shut out something that was too horrible to look upon.

The officer's entrance recalled Count del Nero to himself.

"Where is the culprit?" asked the official.

The Count pointed to Croginolo.

Then the latter spoke, in a voice whose sadness contrasted strangely with the harsh tone it had borne before, and which struck an almost unwilling chord in the breast of the listeners.

"Signor Conte, let me first speak. I shall not be long; and, after that, do with me what you will."

The officer threw a questioning glance at the Count, who replied by a gesture of consent; and then, the room being cleared of all but the principal persons, Croginolo began.

"I am the last of a younger branch of the Saracenos—of the house so long at war with yours—the house which your race has ruined, and finally levelled with the dust. My wife, my poor Maria, was the last left of the elder branch after the death of her brother Gasparo. And she, my wife, reared in comfort and comparative plenty, died in poverty, almost in want, thanks to you and yours. Gasparo lies buried in a pauper's grave, and my poor wife and child—well, no matter! They, too, are gone, and I am alone in the wide world. With my mother's milk I suckled hatred of your house, and even while yet young, swore to seek revenge. I have hugged it to my breast all these years, waiting, meditating, planning. I dragged on a wretched, lonely life, a wanderer and an outcast. What could I do against one rich and powerful as you? I came to this place, and, unknown as I was, strove to pick up all the information I could. Chance did the rest—no, not chance, some higher power—for, Count del Nero, your punishment is a just one. I can hardly say if, were I able, I would undo the past. I have sacrificed myself—for my head must pay for my deed—but my aim has been reached. Your daughter is not the murderess I thought to make her, but robbed for ever of what she prized most in the world, her beauty. The smallest dose does that, a larger one destroys intellect, to end in death."

Here every eye turned upon Beatrice, and a cry broke from every lip.

A hideous smile was playing around the puckered mouth, the stare of an idiot looked forth from the once magnificent eyes.

"My child, my child!" wailed the miserable mother, sinking on her knees beside her daughter.

At the word "child," Croginolo broke forth into a passionate fit of weeping. *His* child, too, was there—within a pace or two of him—the child he had mourned as dead all these long years; and yet he could not, dared not, step forth, whisper the secret of his life into her ear, and fold her to his long-bereaved bosom. By a terrible effort he turned away from her as she knelt there. No, she should never learn now who he was, never know how he would have sacrificed her life to his vengeance, never have cause to blush for the outcast whose life was now forfeited to the law. He would remain silent.

Again the official looked at the Count for guidance.

The latter crossed the room to the open window, and halting there, stood gazing out.

The lands that had once been his rivals' and which were now his, lay stretching wide before him: the ruins of their castle which his ancestors had stormed, sacked, and destroyed, were dimly visible among the brushwood upon the crest of the hill. A thousand deeds of the past started to remembrance, and they spoke a language now that they had never spoken before. Softer feelings awoke, and then Prudence made herself heard. To leave Croginolo in the hands

of the law was to fling his daughter's name and his own a prey to the malice of every idle tongue throughout the land. And what would be gained by doing so?

Then he beckoned the official to his side, and they spoke long and low together. The result was that of many a similar conference. Golden keys were applied, and the secret was locked up, as best it could be, within the massive walls of the Palazzo, that already held so many of a similar stamp in their grim keeping.

Croginolo was set at liberty. Then a sudden impulse seized him, and before he could be stayed, he had flung himself upon his knees at Nella's feet, and endeavoured to take her hands. But with a gesture of horror, she shrank back, warding him off with outstretched arms and turning away her head.

Croginolo was struck straight to the heart. He staggered to his feet, and, his head sunk upon his breast, silently left the chamber.

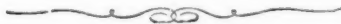
And as he disappeared through the doorway, a burst of wild laughter, such as struck terror into the hearts of all, broke from Beatrice's lips. Her mind had given way.

None ever saw Croginolo again. But years after, when Nella had long been the wife of Ugo, a wandering friar brought her a little packet which he said a dying brother had charged him to deliver into her own hands. While she was engaged in opening it, the friar disappeared.

Within, was a poor little silver medal of the Madonna, discoloured and worn, by bitter tears and passionate kisses, perhaps, and with the name "Maria Saraceno" rudely engraved upon it. Nothing more.

Beatrice recovered her intellect; but her beauty had fled for ever. But, inscrutable though they may be, God's ways are aye the best, for she found a new life in the loving care and companionship of Nella Ugo and their children, whose light footsteps and ringing voices used to echo through the lofty chambers and the long corridors where now the bat flutters and the spider weaves her web.

A. BERESFORD.



WHAT THE STORM DID FOR MATTIE.

BY AN EYE-WITNESS.

"IT'S an ill wind that blows nobody any good," says the proverb, and so says Mattie Warren.

It was a quite unusually nasty, biting, squally east wind that blew Mattie good, certainly; a wind that came in the wake of the terrible winter gales and floods that well-nigh devastated Shrimpton-on-Sea, and brought such woe and suffering to many, that it is little short of a miracle there should be anyone who can think of that weather with gratitude. Yet Mattie is one who can do so.

Shrimpton was Mattie Warren's native place. Her father had been town-clerk there. And now she and her widowed mother and younger sister occupied a little cheap villa at the upper end of High Street, one of a terrace boasting the name of Bella Vista. That is to say, the mother and sister occupied the little villa. Mattie had lived away from home for some years, earning a little money, a very little, as a nursery governess. For the Warrens were very poor. It was only in her holidays, or when she was out of a situation, that the small, bay-windowed villa was Mattie's home.

Poor Mattie. Things looked sufficiently dark for her when she came back to her home just before the great storms. She had lost the situation she had held for two years. The children had grown big enough to go to school. She had no other situation in view. Dick's last letter from Australia (Dick and Mattie had been engaged for eighteen months) though trying to be cheerful, had not been very hopeful or reassuring. He would like to start a sheep-run of his own, if—oh, what a big if to Dick and Mattie!—he only had some capital to start with.

As things were, the time when Dick might hope to come home to fetch Mattie to a home of her own seemed terribly remote.

And so, with matters in this unpromising state, poor Mattie had returned in the dark November weather to her mother's little house.

She made heroic efforts to be bright and cheerful, and asked for all the Shrimpton news; the chief items in which news proving to be, that the Priory, a beautiful old mansion of the date of Queen Anne, after standing empty for twelve months, had been bought by a certain wealthy, middle-aged Miss Goldmore; that she was a very affable, charitable lady; that Shrimpton liked her, and found only two faults, or failings, in her—to wit, a very evident intention of being younger and prettier than she really was, and a rather open setting of her cap at Lord Oldacres, an elderly widower, lord of the manor of Shrimpton, who had been residing at the Park for some

months, and with whom a mutual interest in local charities had brought her acquainted.

"So that's all the news, is it?" said Mattie with a sigh. "Well, it doesn't concern *me* much."

Doesn't it, Mattie? If you could see to the end of the next few days, you might speak differently.

"I wish things looked a little brighter, mother. If I only had a good situation in view, where I should get a large salary, and be able to lay half of it by, so that in a year or so I should have something towards Dick's starting his sheep-run."

"I'm sure I wish you had, Mattie," replied her mother. "Dear, dear! How fearfully the wind blows."

In truth, the blasts which had been blowing all this grey November day from the angry sea, had increased in violence during the afternoon, and now shook the ten little villas comprising Bella Vista until they fairly rocked.

"Oh, mother!" screamed Alice, the younger girl, running down from the upper storey; "the sea is coming right in upon the town."

They all ran to the upper window.

The gale shrieked louder than ever. The sky was black and angry. The furious sea had burst its bounds, and, faster than a horse gallops, was rushing on Shrimpton. The three affrighted women saw a huge wave advancing, a wave that never drew back, that came on—on—on—till, in a few seconds, a sea four feet deep was rushing down the little High Street, whence came the panic-stricken shouts and screams of the inhabitants and passengers, the latter of whom were clinging frantically to passing carts to save themselves from being washed away. In the field immediately opposite Bella Vista two men, already waist deep, were trying to urge the terrified cattle to wade to the higher ground at the back of the town, and a notice-board—"Trespassers will be prosecuted"—on some land marked out for building was uttering its warning to a waste of tumbling waves.

"Oh!" wailed poor Alice; "we shall all be drowned!"

"Let us bring everything we can into the upper rooms," said the calmer, more practical Mattie. And the three, kilting up their skirts, descended to the flooded basement, where the green water grew deeper every moment, and wading into their little parlour sought to rescue such of their small possessions and valuables as could be recovered.

* * * * *

Dark days followed for Shrimpton and the Warrens. The post-man delivered the letters from a boat. Other boats were seen in the lowest-lying part of the town, where the water still lay—boats whose poor occupants, sad of face, were endeavouring, by means of long hooked poles, to rescue some of their pitiful possessions from their still flooded lower rooms. The Warrens, though not among

the very worst sufferers, were much to be pitied in this unforeseen aggravation of their poverty.

Alice's piano and typewriter, both sources of some small income, were destroyed. The parlour furniture was ruined. The kitchen had suffered equally.

Mattie was accordingly not in the best possible spirits, when, the sea having reluctantly gone back to its proper place, she sallied forth one morning to view the devastation.

Here by the roadside lay a drowned donkey. Drowned poultry was scattered on all sides, together with once smart hats and bonnets, the pride of the milliner's shop in High Street, cakes and boxes of biscuits from the confectioner's, and canisters of tea and coffee washed out of the grocer's. Even in all her own trouble, Mattie's kind heart ached for the poor farmers and tradespeople, whose animate and inanimate stock had been destroyed by the flood.

She gained a part of the stone promenade which had suffered less seriously than the rest. A strong, squally, half-gale was blowing. Mattie walked briskly along, to warm herself and try to get into a cheerful and hopeful frame of mind. A lady approached and passed her; a stranger to Mattie, who therefore looked at her with interest. Her face was not young, but her rich dress was youthful in style, and her thick, curled "fringe" and coquettish fur toque were very youthful also.

Mattie looked after her. "I wonder whether that's Miss Goldmore," she murmured.

A minute later a particularly wild gust off the sea drove her to the shelter of a partially wrecked "glass seat" on the promenade. Availing herself of such refuge as it afforded, the girl was arranging her hat and pinning her fall a little closer, when a shrill scream brought her quickly out of her shelter. Some small, dark object was blowing rapidly along towards her, and the lady she had recently passed, her hands to her head, was running wildly after it, uttering despairing cries.

"Oh catch it—stop it," she cried in tones of agony, as she came up with Mattie; "I can't run—I'm tired; catch it! Oh dear—oh dear! What shall I—shall I—do! And Lord Oldacres is coming along!"

Mattie started off after the dark object, which was every moment blowing nearer the edge of the esplanade. With much activity and skill she succeeded in securing it. It proved to be the coquettish fur toque, with the thick curled "fringe" attached to it, which it had carried along with it in its flight. The girl returned to the poor lady, who was cowering in such shelter from observation as the wrecked glass seat granted, still trying to hide with her hands the bald forehead and scanty, greyish side-locks, which the ruthless tearing away of the "fringe" revealed.

"It's all safe," said Mattie cheerfully, though she was a good deal

out of breath. "Nothing is lost. I'll fix it all on again for you in a twinkling, and there's nobody but me near enough to see what has happened." And with a hair-pin or two and a hat-pin of her own she was as good as her word.

The lady recovered her equanimity, dusted her face lightly with a pocket-puff; viewed herself in a tiny mirror concealed in the flap of her purse; peeped out of her shelter, and assured herself that Lord Oldacres was still a long way off, and could not have perceived the details of the tragedy just enacted. Then she turned to Mattie.

"I am Miss Goldmore," she said. "Come and see me to-morrow afternoon at the Priory; and in the meantime don't talk of what has just happened. I will show you that I am not ungrateful."

Then she stepped out upon the promenade again, and Mattie, following her a little later, heard Lord Oldacres greet her in due course with, "Good-morning, Miss Goldmore. Come out, like myself, to see how much of this poor little town of ours is left?"

* * * * *

In a warm, shining drawing-room at the Priory Mattie Warren sat the following afternoon. Miss Goldmore, in perfect order as to hair and complexion, and wearing a youthful, rose-tinted tea-gown, was talking to her.

In answer to questions, Mattie told the whole of her little history, and detailed all her present circumstances. And then her *vis-à-vis*, after a moment or two of thoughtful silence, spoke as follows:

"You did me a very great service yesterday, Miss Mattie Warren. I am a vain woman; I own it; a silly woman, perhaps; and it would have been acute agony to me, if—if—Lord Oldacres had seen me looking as I did when—when—that—blew away which you so nimbly and cleverly recovered and replaced for me. Some rich people (I am a very rich woman, Miss Mattie) to show their gratitude for very timely and acceptable services, put a clause in their wills in favour of the person they wish to benefit. But I—though I am not perhaps quite so young as I should *like* to be—am still a comparatively young woman, and my will might not perhaps take effect for half a lifetime. You are a good, deserving girl, and I am sure that you have borne poverty well and bravely. *Now* is the time when a legacy would be of the greatest use to you, your family and your *fiancé*, and not thirty years hence; and to show my gratitude for what you did for me yesterday, I have decided, instead of putting you into my will, to pay to your credit into any bank you may choose, the sum of £5000."

It was Mattie's turn to be overwhelmed, and bursting into tears, but unable to say a word, she fell on her knees, and kissed Miss Goldmore's jewelled hand. "There, there, my dear," said Miss Goldmore, placing her other hand on Mattie's head, speaking with

something very like tears in her voice : " I trust that you have a long and happy life before you."

And that's what this winter's terrible gales and gusts did for Mattie Warren. No wonder her favourite proverb is—"It's an ill wind that blows nobody any good."

Half her good fortune she has made over to her mother and sister. Well invested, it will add materially to the comfort of their lives. With the other half she and Dick (who is coming home to fetch her) will start a "run" of their own in Queensland in the spring.

In the meantime, thanks to the charitable efforts of Lord Oldacres and Miss Goldmore, poor Shrimpton is recovering from its dire visitation. And the latest news in the town is, that these two popular local magnates are about to be united in the bonds of holy matrimony.



A PETITION.

FROM SULLY PRUDHOMME.

AH! if you knew what tears are shed
By lonely hearth in lonely home,
I think that I should hear your tread—
That you would come.

If you could know what joy may lie
Within the sunshine of a glance,
You would look up when passing by,
As if by chance.

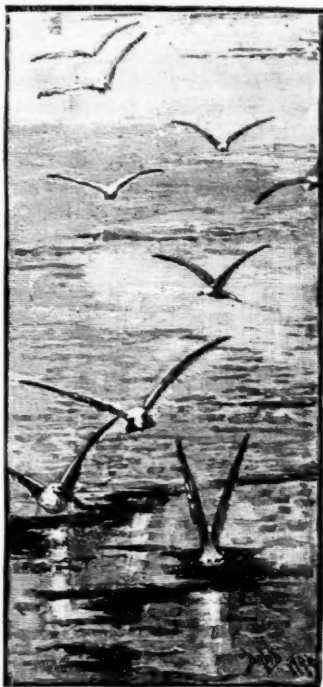
Or if you knew what comforts pour
Like balm from one soft kindly smile,
You would stand near my open door
A little while.

Or if it might be that you knew
How all that's best of dear and fair
You are to me—I think that you
Would enter there!

C. E. MEETKERKE.

IN THE NIGHT-WATCHES.

BY CHARLES W. WOOD, F.R.G.S., AUTHOR OF "LETTERS FROM MAJORCA," "THE ROMANCE OF SPAIN," ETC., ETC.



THE scene was Majorca, loveliest but least known of Mediterranean resorts. We were at Miramar, the very garden of the island. The Archduke Luis Salvador chose well when he discovered this dream-spot and made it his own. Life here is passed in a paradise only to be realised by those who have seen it, lived with it for days, absorbed all its subtle influence.

Our companion was not the poetical H. C. but the more matter-of-fact though equally admirable Dr. FitzGilbert, who had come over on his errand of mercy with the English nurses, to cure A. of his desperate fever. Humanly speaking, A. owed his life to them. He was now fairly out of danger, and after many days and nights of vigil we had come over to Miramar to recruit.

This morning we had thrown ourselves on the slopes overlooking the sea. It stretched away in a blue sheet of water, shimmering and sparkling in the sunshine, apparently boundless as eternity. White-winged gulls flashed and wheeled in the air. Overhead the sun was pouring upon all his intense, life-giving rays. The mere feeling of existence was sufficient happiness. The scene, the hour, the solitude, the sense of supreme repose, combined to create a day-dream of rapture unspeakable. We had eaten the Lotos flower and passed into Elysium.

How H. C. would have revelled in it was a thought that asserted itself loudly; but he had not yet learned to be ubiquitous and was at that moment dancing attendance upon his aunt Lady Maria. An attack of acute rheumatism in the left shoulder-blade had sent her

to Bath. The doctors disagreed upon the point. Some said it was only liver and advised Harrogate and its perfumed waters; some declared it was heart; a third section vowed it rheumatism, and Bath the only remedy. The latter won the day: and H. C. was brought into requisition. We received daily letters from him bewailing his fate. For an hour every morning and an hour every afternoon Lady Maria took the air in a Bath chair. He had to walk beside her or meekly follow after, making conversation and looking as though life had nothing more to be desired. But when we possess an aunt from whom we have great expectations, it is wonderful how adaptable human nature becomes. Apart from that, Lady Maria, with all her crotchets and quavers, her crystallized violet collations and ascetic rules of life, was a really lovable woman, full of secret good deeds and silent sympathy. So H. C. was disporting himself at Bath—just as the sirens were disporting themselves in the blue waters on which we were now gazing. With this difference: the sirens were in their element, but H. C. was very much out of his.

The Archduke himself had just left us, after showing us such hospitality as only the large-hearted can dispense and the grateful appreciate. He had gone off with his white umbrella spread against the sun to the far end of his domain to visit a retainer sick unto death. Consolation would go with him; but to us it seemed hard to leave this wonderful world, with all its charm and beauty, the keen sense of life, the glories of earth, the wonders of sea and sky. The Archduke's footsteps grew faint and died out, and then we might have been the last men left on earth. Absolute repose and stillness; no singing birds in the neighbouring trees; not the faintest murmur from the branches, for not a breath of air stirred. We almost wished that life could go on like this for ever; forgetting that one great charm lay in the sense of much-needed rest. That satisfied, energy and a desire for action, mental and physical, would soon reassert themselves.

We had been lying on the slopes gazing at the shimmering sea, the clear blue sky, for what seemed an eternity. Silence had reigned, for words seemed only a disturbing element, when suddenly Fitz-Gilbert propounded a question. In the midst of all this sublime beauty that we were absorbing on the very threshold of the celestial gates, he half turned and said:

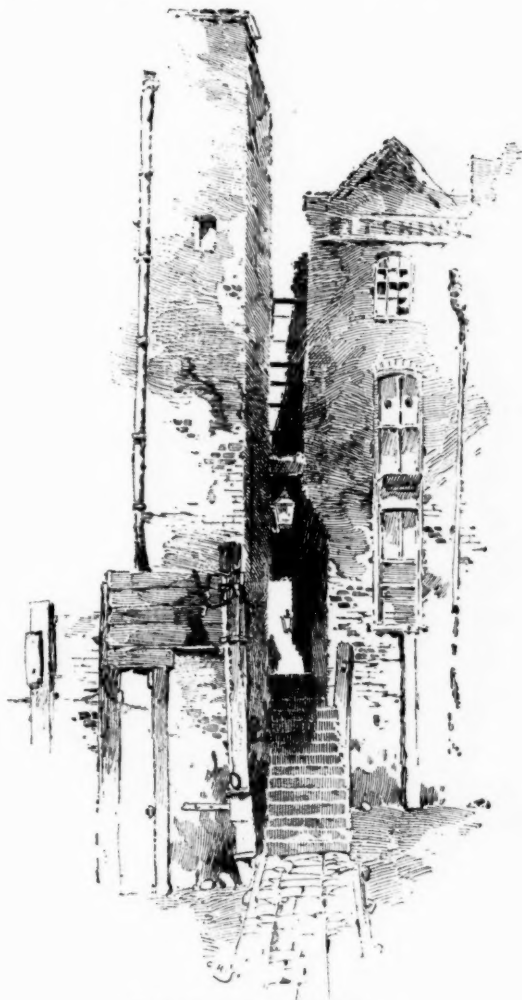
"Did you ever visit the opium dens at the East End of London?"

Had the sun suddenly gone out and left us in total darkness and chaos, we could not have been brought back more rudely to the realities of earth. The very air seemed startled at the sound.

"Et tu, Brute!" we cried. "How can you bring the Antipodes together in this manner? The very sirens heard you and resented. One rose but now and lashed the water with her tail."

"There are sirens at the east of London as well as in those deep

blue waters," laughed the incorrigible FitzGilbert. "Not so alluring and refined and poetical, perhaps, but much more real and substantial. But tell me; have you ever paid these dens a visit?"



EASTWARD ON THE THAMES.

"Never even heard of them," was the reply; "had no idea they existed. Opium dens in London seem impossible. You mean Hong-Kong, or Bombay."

"I mean London," calmly replied FitzGilbert. "The little village; the most enlightened capital in the world. It shall be my first duty to make you acquainted with them on our return to England."

"Will they admit you, Fitz?"

"I have the entrée," he replied, in tones a favoured dame might use on declaring the same privilege hers at a Drawing-room.

"How came you to have it?"

"I once restored one of their men who was given over for dead," returned FitzGilbert. "He was a popular character amongst them, and they have never forgotten the circumstance. If I wanted it, I believe they would supply me with tea and opium enough to hand round even to my forty-fourth cousin twice removed. With all their faults, these heathen Chinese are a grateful set."

"Are they all Chinese, these supporters of the opium dens?"

"Chinese or Indians," said FitzGilbert. "And if one had to choose between them, I fancy the Indians are the better of the two."

"Is there a 'better' in such a case?"

"Well, the less worse, least worst—how would you put it grammatically?" retorted FitzGilbert. "I sometimes get logged in my parts of speech. The English grammar is all rules and exceptions—abominably puzzling."

"Fortunately you don't operate and prescribe by grammar," we laughed. "But about these dens. Are they very terrible? Can you conscientiously advise one to go over them?"

"I am not going to spoil your pleasure by any anterior description," laughed this irritating son of *Æsculapius*. "You must go to them with a judgment unbiassed and impressions unformed. After that we can compare experiences—I don't think they will be at daggers drawn. We shall not want coffee and pistols and seconds to settle the matter. Ever since I cured that poor fellow there is nothing they would not do for me: and I verily believe that if I turned missionary I should convert them all in a body."

"Why not make the attempt?"

FitzGilbert laughed. "*Ce n'est pas mon métier*," he retorted. "They might well turn round and say 'Physician, heal thyself.' Every man to his last. Mine the cure of bodies; to others the cure of souls. You, for instance, with your sympathetic——"

"Spare us," we interrupted. "Don't go from the sublime to the ridiculous. Then are we to consider the opium dens an engagement in the future, a little further off, or a little nearer, as the case may be?"

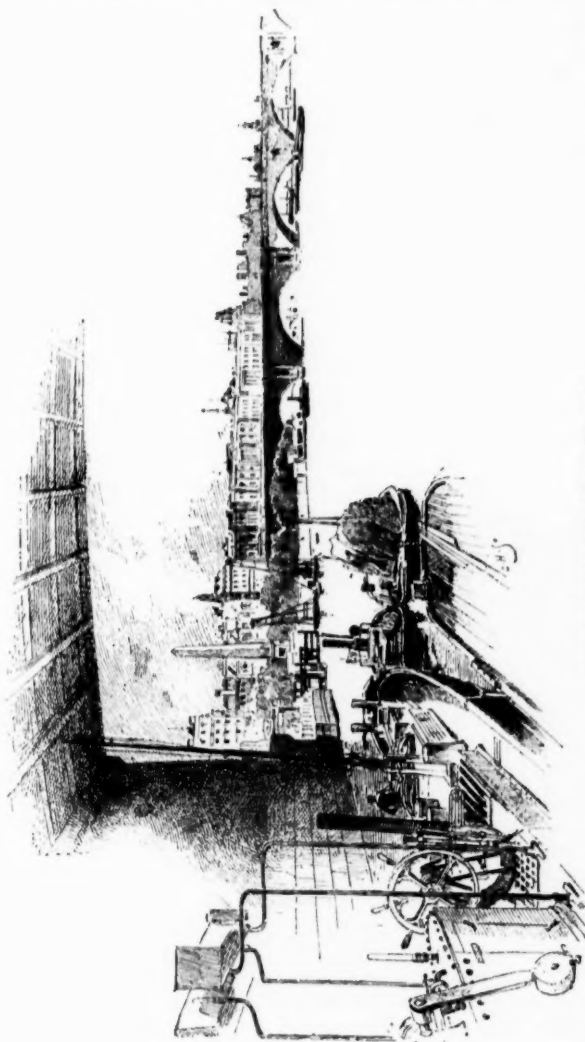
"Fixed and unalterable," replied FitzGilbert. "We will have a grand night of it, and leave nothing unseen."

"It will be as well, for probably we shall never want to repeat the experiment."

"That's as may be," laughed FitzGilbert. "But one thing I can promise you—you will be safe under my pilotage."

So under the blue skies of the Levant, amidst the matchless

beauties of Majorca, where it was inconceivable there could be sin and sorrow in the world, we made this strange bargain.



UNDER CHARING CROSS BRIDGE.

Man proposes. The bargain was never kept. FitzGilbert never became our guide, philosopher and friend to the opium dens of East London. We were not to play Telemachus to his Mentor.

Years went on, and suddenly from quite another quarter the subject sprang up again. In the meantime we had often thought and dwelt upon the matter; wondering what these dens were, who frequented them, what was done in them. Many a time we had mentally pictured the scenes; visions uprose of what we should find. Now it was a large gilded saloon, all mirrors and tinsel and glitter and electric-lighting, where people reposed on divans, smoked their opium-charged pipes, drank sherbet, and passed the hours in the most delicious dreams.

"That would be all very well at the West end," said one to whom we said as much—a friend of many years, who knew every inch of the East end ground. "That would do very well for your West end smokers," he repeated: "and let me tell you that your West end opium smokers are not as rare as you might imagine: but you will not find gilded saloons and a perfumed atmosphere at the East end. Such luxuries would be lost upon those who haunt the dens."

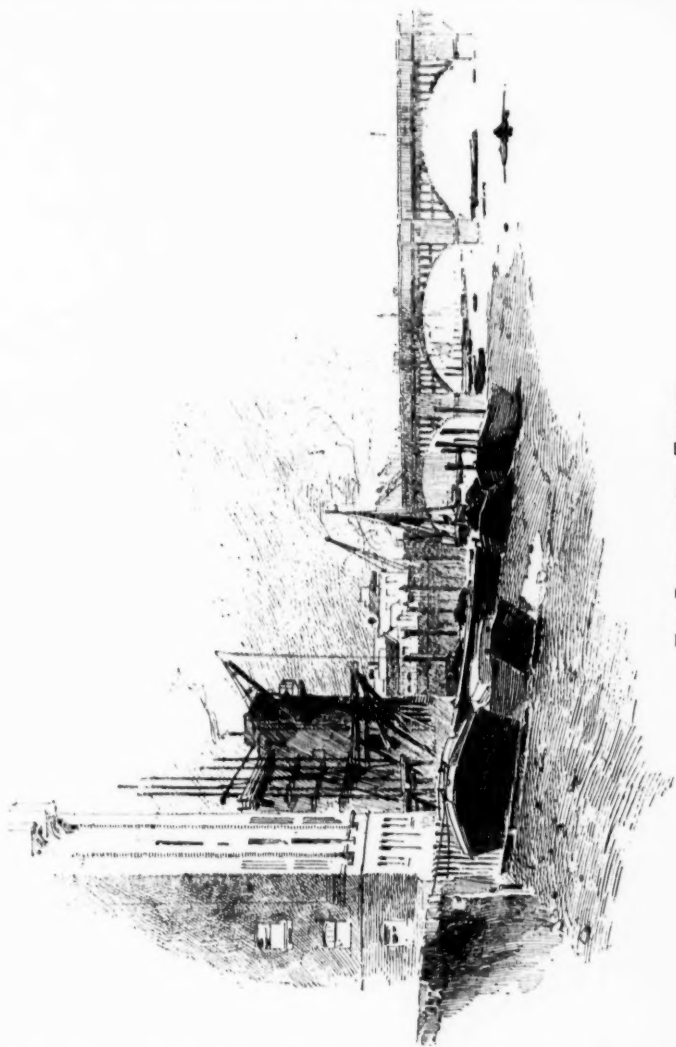
And he smiled gravely as he thought how different from all this was the reality.

But sometimes we had other visions and ideas. We saw, in imagination, a huge underground cave, with the Orientals and Celestials squatting on carpets, and smoking their opium, and falling into a state of blissful unconsciousness or of dreamy delight. In the cave dwelt that semi-obscurity that makes even the hard and the hideous picturesque, softens all outlines, conceals all defects, and leaves the fancy free to form its own pictures. We saw clouds of opium smoke—darker and denser than tobacco-smoke, yet less penetrating—rising to the roof and tainting the atmosphere with its sickly, subtle influence. Silence reigned, as one by one the smokers fell back into their Lotus-land, each seeing visions and dreaming dreams indescribable, and feeling as though every passing moment was an eternity, and they were for ever floating through endless space. Of course the beauty and refinement of visions and sensations, the ecstatic element, must be in accordance with the material acted upon. These ruder natures would be translated to the first heaven of sensation: the seventh heaven being only attainable to those whose minds, nerves and natures were of finer mould, and in whom the luxury of self-indulgence would consequently be the greater sin. It was entirely an eastern scene that we pictured to ourselves, and with something of the charm of the east about it.

"Again you are wrong," said this friend, to whom we confided our visions. And again the same grave smile arose as he thought of the difference between fancy and reality. We will call him Hafiz, and imagine him dressed in Oriental costume, acting the part of Grand Vizier.

"Your imagination soars far above fact," said Hafiz. "It is evident that you have read the Arabian Nights to good purpose. Your mind is saturated with Oriental scenes, and images. You

picture to yourself everything that is gorgeous, splendid and magnificent. For the realisation of such dreams you must penetrate to



THE BANKS OF THE THAMES.

India itself. Go to Agra and gaze upon the Taj and marvel at the devotion that raised the tomb. There you will find your Eastern visions realised. Or go to Burmah, and look upon the golden

temples glittering in the sun's golden rays, and again you will say that fact surpasses fancy ; but expect nothing gorgeous in the East end of London, unless it be the gorgeousness of squalor, want, and misery. Not that those opium-smoking Indians and Celestials are miserable. On the contrary : they are distinguished by an invariable good humour and placidity of temperament that your Englishman would do well to imitate. They are an eminently contented race—at least I can speak for those who visit our shores."

"But how far is opium-smoking to be credited with this happy condition of things?"

"Not at all," returned Hafiz. "Very many of them never attempt to smoke opium, yet are as happy as though they lived in kings' houses and fared sumptuously every day."

"And they are not idle or depraved or dishonest?"

"Quite the opposite. These Indians and Chinese are largely a floating population ; sailors who come and go : spending their time between Hong-Kong and London—or some other Chinese or Indian port. A few weeks on shore here, a few weeks there. True, many spend their wages much too quickly and unsatisfactorily—but where will you find the Englishman of their class not guilty of the same folly? And they have a certain element of religion in them—superstitious though it may be—that is too often utterly wanting in your English sailor, who with infinitely more privileges and opportunities is frequently the inferior. But you should visit and see and judge for yourself."

"Would it not be a painful experience?" we asked, though determined to go through it.

"These sights and sounds and experiences must be more or less painful," returned Hafiz. "In the opium dens, naturally, you will not find a high moral tone. But I hold that every human experience and investigation, rightly carried through, must produce some good to the investigator. The more we look into every type of being under the sun, the closer we shall get to the problems of sin and evil, the more we shall fit ourselves to battle with them. No man ever yet laid one single brick upon the great structure of Reform that steadily kept aloof from misery and degradation. If we are to do humanity any good we must get to the bottom of human nature, and we can only do that by frequent visitation ; by returning to the charge over and over again ; by long thought and study ; and by looking very much into our own heart, and diligently mastering our own complex nature. But the great source of power, and the great secret of success is Sympathy. Without that you may as well try to reach the moon as to influence your fellow mortal, no matter what his rank in life. And how quickly we find out where the divine gift exists," continued Hafiz. "Before you have been ten minutes in a man's company you are repelled or attracted. Ten minutes? I would rather say ten seconds. For my own part, the first look is

sufficient. And I would almost rather judge a man before speaking to him than after. The face cannot lie, but words may now and then do so, though it is seldom that the undertone, the hidden meaning, the thing kept back, escapes me. Speech was given to us to conceal our thoughts, says the old proverb, but it is seldom that I cannot read between the lines."

"That is a gift born with one, and it is given to comparatively few," we remarked.

"Born in the first instance," returned Hafiz, "and like every other gift, becomes perfect through practice and cultivation."

"Do you often visit the East end and the opium dens?" we asked.

"Much oftener at one time than now," replied Hafiz. "I have spent a great deal of thought and energy in the East end, amongst all people and tongues, English as well as foreign, but I seldom go now. As for the opium dens, they used to be far more numerous than they are to-day. But I still visit them occasionally, and will escort you willingly; or if you prefer it, you might accompany one who is far more amongst them than I ever was. In the Night Watches—at all hours—he would pilot you about in safety."

"Have you ever smoked opium yourself, Hafiz?"

"Yes," he replied smiling, "though not in one of these dens. Heaven forbid! But out of curiosity and for the sake of experience, I once went through a short spell of opium-smoking. I thought it might be useful, would put me more in touch with these poor fellows who become slaves to the habit. I should better understand their temptation; be better able to fight with them, answer their arguments; prove the fleeting nature of the pleasure, the terrible retribution from which there is no escape. For a whole week I gave myself up to the work."

"And with what result? Was the game worth the candle? Are the Elysian dreams, the ecstatic visions, overdrawn?"

"Not in my case," smiled Hafiz. "But I had quite an exceptional experience. Had I not been pretty sure of myself, there might have been cause for regret. I would advise no one who has not the strongest control over his moral nature, ever to attempt anything of the sort. A single week would be enough to give a man a taste for it that he might never overcome. But in the case of these poor fellows we are discussing—Celestials though they be—I fancy their dreams and visions are limited; landing them very far off the gates of heaven. Some have none whatever unless they smoke twenty or thirty pipes right off."

"And you? What did they do for you?"

"I may say that for one week I have been in Elysium—or paradise," returned Hafiz. "Whether it was that my nature, mental, physical and moral, was in a thoroughly sound state, I cannot tell; but for that short week I experienced all the delights with none of the miseries, none of the reaction that almost invariably, almost inevitably

accompany the practice. I had dreams of bliss indescribable ; visions of beatitude not belonging to this earth ; I was for ever floating through space, as though my spirit had thrown off all its material element. I roamed amidst the stars, every one of which seemed large as a universe, brilliant as a sun. Floods of glorious light surrounded me. Strains of music that I can only call celestial accompanied me. I had visions of bright creatures that floated in the deep blue ether, and could only be angels. There was nothing mortal, nothing tangible about them ; they looked diaphanous, yet were perfect in form and were clothed in lustrous raiment. Their beauty was beyond anything the ordinary mind of man could possibly imagine. They sang in soft sweet strains that seemed to float through illimitable space. All sense of time was abolished : I was in eternity. For hours I would lie, in a sort of waking dream that was happiness unspeakable : and I know not whether this waking state or the sleeping was the more ecstatic. Such was my experience. I say that I lost all sense of time. Past and future had no place : the present was all in all. I was absorbed in a mere feeling of *existence* that was all-sufficient. Nothing jarred or worried me. The troubles of the world, the petty cares of every-day life, all had passed away. Memory seemed blotted out. Nothing had power to irritate or disturb. I lived in an endless now, possessor of a boundless and eternal realm."

"Was the condition at all the same as that produced by wine ?" we asked.

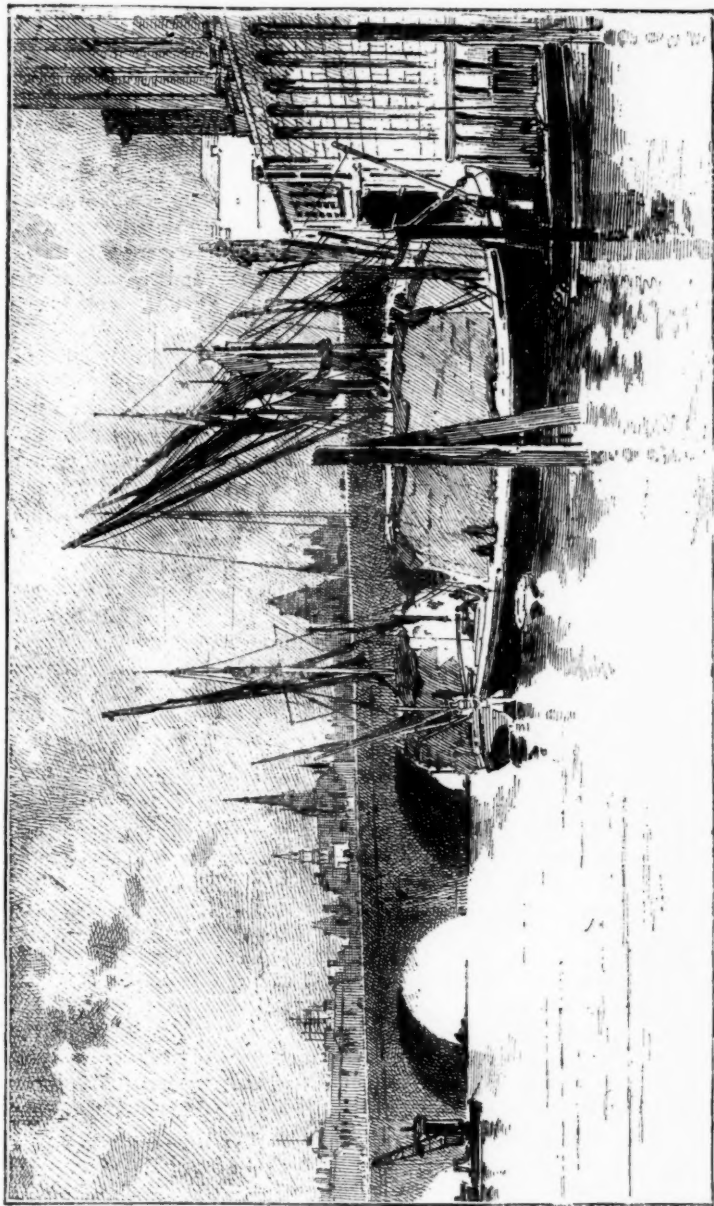
"Not in the least," replied Hafiz. "The exhilaration caused by alcohol is as nothing compared with that of opium-smoking. And I may say this much for the opium-smoker : that he is never reduced to the condition of the drunkard. Whatever the evils of opium-smoking—and they are sure and terrible—there is never that frightful and degrading spectacle that is so often seen in the indulgence of strong drinks. In the one case a man reduces himself to a condition lower than the brute creation ; in the other, the evil is slower, more secret and stealthy ; the brain goes by imperceptible degrees."

"How do you account for the difference ?"

"Very easily. The actions of alcohol and opium are directly opposed to each other. The one is sedative, the other exciting. The one elevates you for the time being ; plunges you into a state above that of mortals : the other quickly and visibly degrades as I have said, to a condition below the beasts of the field. The action of the one is immediate, the action of the other remote : but it is insidious, certain, deadly. A man may indeed exclaim who takes to opium-smoking : 'All those who enter here, leave hope behind !'"

"What is the strongest force antagonistic to opium ?" we asked.

"I believe phosphorus," returned Hafiz. "I know of no greater counteracting influence : and it is for this reason that spirits counteract the effect of the drug. Alcohol withdraws phosphorus from



EARLY MORNING ON THE THAMES.

the brain, distributing it through the veins, creating a desire for action. Opium *destroys* phosphorus: hence its soothing, sedative influence with the accompanying desire to lie still and dream away for ever."

"Do you remember your dreams and visions in your waking moments, Hafiz?"

"That is one of the most delightful things connected with it," he replied. "I remembered them vividly, distinctly. Nothing was forgotten. Had I been an artist I could have painted wondrous scenes: or a writer, have filled a volume with experiences from another world: for certainly all I felt and saw and heard in my dreams and visions were too full of ecstasy for anything connected with this material universe."

"But what about the reaction? Your frightful headaches, fits of depression, nervous dreads, lassitude and sleepless nights?"

"I never had any," returned Hafiz. "I have said that my experience was exceptional. For the week that I smoked opium I was in paradise. There was no reverse to the medal; no reaction; no sense of discomfort or depression. Had I gone on and become an opium-smoker, no doubt all this would have followed in due time. Il faut payer pour ses plaisirs: and the price is a terrible one. But I was doing it by way of an experiment; I wanted the experience to make use of it. I can't quite tell how, but I always felt as though it was not I myself who was going through it all. It seemed, as it were, outside me. All through the time my inner consciousness, my spirit, seemed to be looking on from a distance. This in collected moments; in my dreams and visions I had lost all my own identity; was only conscious of the phase through which I was passing. I floated through the Empyrean, I fraternised with the stars—as I have just said; a countless host ever surrounded me; the harmony of the spheres expressed itself in strains that sang through space; I was immortal, and everything around me was eternal. At the end of the week, I, as it were, closed the book of my experience; closed it for ever; and rose up, and shook it all from me, and was none the worse."

"A dangerous experiment. You must possess a strange and exceptional temperament."

"No doubt I do," returned Hafiz. "Not one man in ten thousand would come out of it as I did. But remember how all my life I have endeavoured to keep the material under the control of the spiritual. One or other must gain the victory, especially in strong natures full of impulse. My life in the midst of the world has really been very much that of the monk in his cell. I once drew up a catalogue of duties, of small penances, of self-denials for my own use and guidance—not for any one else's. I had them printed, and keep them in my sanctum sanctorum. I have followed them out, and by stern repression have gained many a hard-fought victory. Sometimes I

have passed a whole night fighting with the unseen powers of darkness; and never fought in vain."

The beauty of his face, the large clear hazel eye, the splendour of his brow—a perfectly balanced head—all spoke to his exceptional nature. He reminded one of the pictures we had seen of Robertson of Brighton, and the two natures must have had much in common. Contemporaries, they would have been fast friends.

"I have never told any one of these rules and ways and doings of mine," continued Hafiz; "and you will not betray me. When I first started in life I felt two strong opposing forces within. There was no doubt as to which must conquer."

"But to go back to this opium question," we said, determined to return to this personal subject on another occasion, and extract from him mines of experience and wisdom. "Your result was exceptional, and we now see why it was. What about those who smoke and do not repent—are they not to be pitied?"

"Undoubtedly," returned Hafiz, "but they would not tell you so. Nor do they think it. Very many of these Celestials and Indians are mentally and physically inferior, and they go on smoking year after year, and seem not very much the worse for it. It is your finer natures that suffer, deteriorate and collapse. For these great and terrible is the ruin. But you must go to the East end yourself, and gain some personal experience amongst the Celestials and Indians."

"How shall it be done?"

"As I have said, I will accompany you if you like," replied Hafiz. "Or I will place you in the hands of those who now labour amongst them, and know them all by their names. Know all their histories, good, bad and indifferent; have watched them for years; converted some of them, married some of them, buried a few; but, I believe, rarely found one utterly and completely worthless. They are simply children of a larger growth; going through life with an *insouciance* one might almost envy, if it were not that it is born of the utter carelessness and indifference and want of thought and power of realization of a grown-up childhood. In short they have not the least idea of being responsible beings, and it is almost impossible to impress that fact upon them."

"It would be pleasanter to go with 'one's own familiar friend,' rather than with strangers. Will you arrange to take us there?"

"Willingly," smiled Hafiz. "But I warn you that I might be of less use to you than those I propose should take you in hand. I am not quite the familiar figure amongst them I once was. I have not their names and histories by heart. Still we will go together. L'un n'empêche pas l'autre. You can accompany the labourers in that East end vineyard if you have a mind to repeat the experiment."

"Which you think doubtful?" we observed drily.

Hafiz smiled but said nothing. Silence can be more eloquent than words.

"When shall we take the plunge?"

"'If 'twere done, 'twere well 'twere done quickly,'" quoted Hafiz. "A trite but true saying, and as old as Shakespeare. Let us say this day week, if you are not engaged."

So it was arranged; but again fate interposed. When that day week arrived Hafiz had been summoned to Rome to what was supposed to be the death-bed of his only and much-loved brother. Eventually he recovered, and it really seemed that the joy of meeting Hafiz, his strong magnetic influence which made him a tremendous power wherever he went, brought back the ebbing tide of life and set it flowing to recovery. Certain it is, that from the moment Hafiz entered the sick-room, a change for the better set in.

"After all we are not to go together to the dens of the Celestials," he wrote to us on the eve of his sudden journey: "at least not on this occasion. But I don't believe in delays and so I have arranged for you to go down, and one of the missionaries will take you round. They are excellent men who have gone on their way for years amidst the most depressing influences; sowing and sowing their seed, but seldom reaping anything in the way of harvest. As far as they know—for who can tell what shall come up after many days?"

Then followed directions as to ways and means too clearly expressed to admit of going astray. In another post or two came a note from the missionary offering to do for us all in his power.

So according to appointment, we found ourselves one cold dark night about seven o'clock at Fenchurch Street Station, a sort of black hole amidst the railway stations of London. No wonder, since it leads to all that great district of the East end, where the old saying that cleanliness is next to godliness is neither known nor followed.

Of its kind, there can scarcely be a more remarkable and impressive, a sadder sight than the labyrinth of houses lying between Fenchurch Street and Blackwall, thronged to suffocation by a population too often of a hopeless character. This on one side the road; on the other side the scene changes to the picturesque outlines of vessels lying in the docks: a world apart, where the commonplace element does not exist.

The train rolled through it all, and set us down at our station. A few moments and we found ourselves in one of the large main thoroughfares of the East end. A crowd was still moving to and fro, tramcars and omnibuses were thronged with a rough set of people; the women dressed as only East end women can dress. The air was laden with the unsavoury smell of fried fish, and though numerous the shops, the supply seemed hardly equal to the demand. The owners were Hebrews of a very distinct character. There was plenty of drunkenness to be seen staggering along the streets, and we thought of the words of Hafiz, that opium-smoking, however bad, is less openly revolting than the abuse of alcohol. We here saw drunkenness in its most degraded, most horrible form; but it was

still early, and the East End wars one hears so much about had not yet begun.

A few minutes brought us to an Asiatic Home, a house where the Celestials may congregate, talk, read, and do everything but sleep. Here the missionary, Mr. G., had undertaken to meet us. We found him in a small room, bare of all furniture but a couple of long desks, forms, and a chair or two made for use and not for ornament. Here sat Mr. G. with, on the desk before him, a small round box or basket—Chinese receptacle for a tea-pot. The inside was thickly lined and padded, and in the centre reposed the porcelain treasure, keeping itself warm for hours. Mr. G. himself was on the horns of a dilemma.

In the room were several Chinese, well-dressed and respectable-looking, without a trace of opium dreams and visions about them.

"Oh, these are not opium-smokers," explained Mr. G.: "and a great many of the Celestials you meet here will have nothing to do with opium. The ordinary pipe is enough for them, and in the clear eye and animated air, you can soon distinguish between those who smoke opium and those who do not. But my dilemma is this. I have taken a passage out to Hong-Kong for these men. They must leave to-night. If in an hour and a half they are not at Liverpool Street, they will lose their train—lose their ship—lose their passage. Now these men are so helpless that if I do not go with them to Liverpool Street, and actually put them into the train, it is certain that of themselves they will never get there. They expect me to do everything for them; and, poor fellows, I hardly wonder. They are only children of a larger growth, knowing very little English. Now what am I to do? If I take you round this evening, the men will certainly never get off. If I go with them to Liverpool Street, then I cannot take you round. Our expedition must be postponed. What is to be done?"

It needed no consideration.

"Could you come some other evening?" asked Mr. G.

"Quite easily. Or await your return this evening, when the expedition might take place during the Night-Watches."

"There can be no return for me," said Mr. G. "I live at some distance from here, and my last train leaves something after midnight. But you see how helpless these good fellows are. One would as soon abandon a lost child as leave them to their own devices."

In truth they were all looking at him with such an expression as a child would use in looking at its guardian. They had dressed themselves in their best; European clothes, with no trace of China about them; pigtailed well tucked up under caps, to prevent street boys from pulling them off.

"Then the sooner we start the better," said Mr. G. "Now, my men, where is your cab?" he asked in Chinese.

They stared helplessly.

"I told you to bring a cab," he continued. "You don't expect me to get one?"

Yes; they expected him to do everything.

"Where am I to find one?" he asked. "You don't come across cabs here as you do at the West end. This is the East end, remember."

But that was quite beyond them. They could remember nothing, do nothing, except leave everything to him.

"They would really try the patience of an angel," cried Mr. G., half laughing, half desperate. "The long and the short of it is," consulting his watch, "they will lose their train and passage after all. Now you," turning to the eldest of the party, who had smartened himself up with a black silk cap, "go off and see what you can do. Bring the very first cab you meet. Don't let it escape you, or you are lost men and your passage is forfeited."

The possessor of the black silk cap, at length aroused to the jeopardy of the situation, went off in a very forlorn sort of state, taking a younger man with him by way of company.

"Now we will go round to the den where they have left their baggage," said Mr. G. "And I very much doubt if it will leave the place this evening."

We went out into the night. The thoroughfare was brilliant enough, with its gas jets flaring here and there, lighting up the pale and sickly faces of the people as they passed to and fro. At one corner, a boy with a pathetic face stamped with the monotony of life was opening oysters at a stall, and customers were coming to him in ones and twos. They did so with a very matter-of-fact air as if they were *habitués* of this attractive establishment. It was evident that in his humble way he had already formed a *clientèle*, and had a good-will to dispose of. Probably he had learned the secret of the "nimble ninepence," and gave excellent wares at a very moderate profit. We went up to him for a moment.

"What is your name?" we asked, rather abruptly.

He looked at us for a moment; then seeing that we neither wore a helmet nor had an unfriendly expression, answered: "Joe Turner, sir."

"You seem to be doing a good trade, Joe. How much a night do you earn at this?"

"Well, sir," he replied, opening his oysters the while, "that's a delicate question. I often make as much as five shillings. People know me about here, and oysters are popular. I save a lot, for I mean to get on in the world."

There was no doubt he would do so, if life and health were given him. We left him to his oysters and his customers, and presently turned into a narrow thoroughfare, and suddenly plunged into Egyptian darkness.

"What is the name of this place?" we asked.

"Paradise Row," quickly replied Mr. G. with a comical intonation. "It hardly comes up to its name, you will say."

"Nor do angels live here, probably?"

"Not exactly," with more quaint humour. "Or if so, they are angels without wings. But, oh, considering their disadvantages, their temptations, their manifold opportunities for sin, their few for doing good or being good, it is a marvel that they are not every one



JOE TURNER.

of them demons incarnate. On the contrary you will find many a worthy trait amongst them: above all, kind-heartedness; helping one another; little acts of charity and mutual support that, when constantly practised, I place amongst the cardinal virtues. How do we so-called Christians act in similar circumstances? Take that late storm that devastated my county of Essex, bringing ruin and destruction to so many under my very eyes, almost at my very door. Half a dozen rich men might have clubbed together, and covered the

whole evil without denying themselves one fraction of a pleasure. A subscription was got up, it is true, but how slowly it came in, and how small the sum-total compared with what was wanted. However, we will not moralise, and here is our den. But I hear no sound of wheels; evidently no cab to be found. The men are off goodness knows where, and will return goodness knows when."

"*This* one of the dens?" we cried, as the scales fell from the eyes.

"Yes," replied our guide. "And it is exactly what it professes to be and calls itself: *a den*. It does not call itself a palace, and you will find no gorgeous trappings or luxurious surroundings within or without. Remember they do not cater for West end customers. No gilded lord or spoilt child of fortune comes down here to smoke opium."

Hafiz had prepared us, but the reality went beyond description. What we saw was a small, poverty-stricken shop, and the light that came from it intensified the surrounding darkness. In this light the faces of some six or eight Chinese stood out conspicuously. The high cheek bones, the parchment-like skin, the dark glittering eyes, the weak, defective chin, all proclaimed the inhabitant of the Celestial Empire. Our guide boldly went in amongst them, and they all seemed glad to see him: evidently recognising in him one who had their welfare at heart; would do them good if they would allow it, but never harm. We followed, and although for a moment they eyed us curiously—as a mouse would a cat, or a sparrow a hawk, still they felt that anyone coming under the wing of Mr. G. must have friendly intentions. He could bring no traitor to the camp.

The master of the place, a young intelligent-looking Chinese, stood behind a counter selling opium prepared for smoking. The drug comes over from China in a hard substance something like a cannon-ball, and in going through its course of preparation much is wasted. This preparation needs great care and trouble. The hard substance having been well boiled is strained through flannel into a copper vessel; then strained through another flannel: the result being a thick black liquid, something like solid treacle. This liquid—horrible-looking stuff—the Chinese was weighing in some curious scales. Black glittering eyes and eager faces looked on, saw that full measure was given, paid their money and marched into the den, or departed to some other favourite resort. The opium-dispenser gave us a friendly nod, as though to bid us welcome.

"Will you have some opium?" he said, ready to bestow a portion upon us gratuitously. "Opium very good; no bad; no. People tell stories. Smoke opium, live hundred years. Beautiful dreams, happy world. Me give you very fine pipe."

"Do you smoke opium?" we asked him.

"Me, no," he replied, and looking at his clear eye and brisk manner, we believed him. "Me no time. Me sell, not smoke."

And probably was making a fairly good thing of it, as things are

now. The days when opium dens flourished and waxed rich were some fifty years ago. Since then they have gradually declined from various causes. One great blow was ceasing to pay the Indian and Chinese sailors their wages on arriving in England, where they were soon robbed of all they possessed. Their pay, therefore, stood over until their return to India or China. Thus the dens lost their chief supporters. What remains to-day can hardly be called the "survival of the fittest:" and some of them are so poor that how they live at all is a mystery.



We left the Chinaman weighing his opium, and followed our guide into the "den," at the back of the small shop: a room not twelve feet square, in which some six or eight Celestials were crowded: the unoccupied space taken up by the bags and chests of the men bound for Hongkong via Liverpool Street. Here, the atmosphere was suffocating, and the den might have been cleaned out in the last century: never since. The men all greeted our guide as a friend: he was no enemy in disguise.

"Sit down," said Mr. G.—but we trembled for the consequences and said so.

"Have no fear," he returned; "if opium-smoking does no other

good, it completely banishes all undesirable acquaintances. Fear nothing here."

On one side the den was a couch on which two men were lying, with a small table between them. Each held an opium pipe: a curious invention with a thick long stem three inches in circumference, and a peculiar saucer-like, closed-in bowl with a very small aperture for holding the drug. On the table was a small lighted lamp. One of the men held a wire at the end of which was a piece of the liquid opium as large as a pea. This he kept over the flame, heating it until it began to smoke, when it was quickly transferred to the pipe, and taken into the mouth in, as far as possible, one long unbroken draw. This presently passes out again through the mouth or nose—the latter having more effect upon the brain. The smoke is denser, darker, than tobacco smoke. There is a good deal of art in smoking opium: in the preparation of the opium itself; in heating it to the exact point without allowing it to burn; in placing it properly in the small receptacle of the bowl; the drawing it into the mouth in a special manner, without which, out goes the pipe. These pipes, worth new about five shillings, when they become old and well-seasoned have risen in value to fabulous prices: occasionally fetching as much as £1500.

The two men on the couch smoking, sent forth dense fumes into the room. Yet somehow these fumes affected the atmosphere far less than tobacco smoke. There was a less pungent and aromatic scent about them. In fact as far as we could tell, the smoke had no scent at all. Their knowledge of English was very limited; they were as far removed from real "Celestials" as imagination could conceive.

Another man, not smoking, held a tea-pot in his hand, and in largeness of heart poured some into a cup and offered it to us. This was a terrible ordeal.

"I am afraid you must take it," said our guide, "or he will be highly offended."

So we spared the man's feelings at the sacrifice of our own. The tea was a pale straw colour and to our surprise was some of the most delicious and refined we had ever tasted.

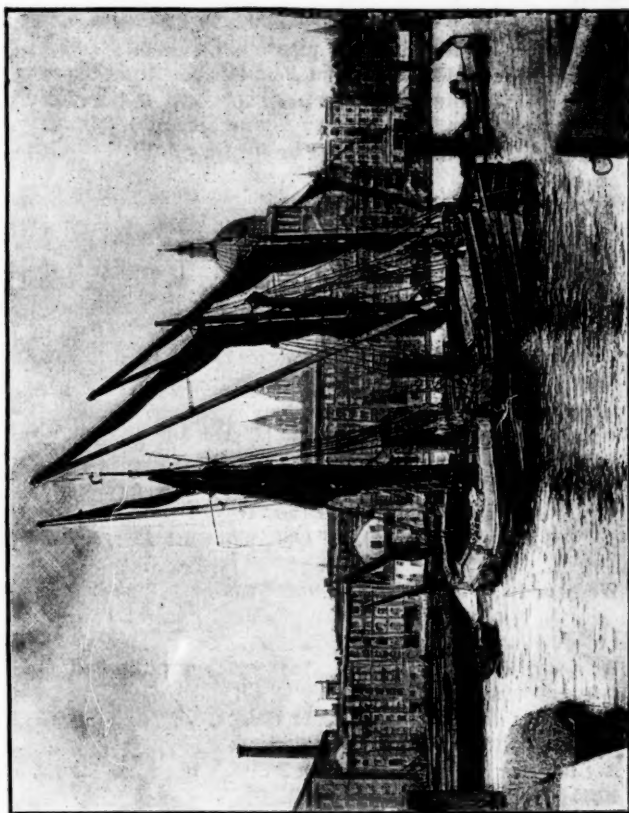
"We brought it with us from China," said the man, Mr. G. interpreting. "Over there it is worth six shillings a pound. It is the finest grown, and was given to us by one on the plantation."

Like our guide, he had a specially-prepared box for his tea-pot, so padded and wadded that you might have thrown it over St. Paul's and it would have come down safely. The men smoking looked on.

"Our opium better than your tea," one observed in broken English. "You smoke opium, sir; no harm you; me give you pipe." And he proceeded to offer us the pipe he was using.

Here, however, feelings or no feelings, we drew the line, and declined the pipe.

"It is really offered as the 'pipe of peace,'" said our guide, "but I cannot urge you to accept it, as I did the tea. Nor will its refusal offend. They know quite well that we look upon it as a bad habit, and condemn it. One thing it does—stays the pangs of hunger. An opium smoker will go through the whole day without eating, or even the smallest craving for food. It is meat and drink to him.



But you see the life they lead on shore. Here they come, by day or by night and smoke pipe after pipe through the Night Watches; perhaps eventually falling asleep, and waking up in the grey dawn, cold and wretched—when a few more pipes are put into requisition to restore their lost balance: like the man who, having taken too much alcohol overnight, finds a whisky and soda necessary on rising, to steady his nerves and cure his headache. But I fear the atmosphere

of the room is growing oppressive—and I hear the sound of wheels at last. Have they really turned up with a cab?"

We made our way out, the inhabitants of the den—quiet and peaceable and inoffensive Celestials they seemed: nobody's enemy but their own—intimating by way of friendly good-bye that we were welcome. The outer shop was still crowded, opium-weighing still going on.

"Me very sorry you no smoke," said the Chinaman, adjusting a refractory scale. "Me give you pipe and opium all for nothing," he added with genuine liberality: but even this could not tempt us.

At that moment the black velvet cap appeared at the door excited and triumphant.

"Wel'," said Mr. G., "have you brought a cab?"

Yes, he had.

We went outside into the Egyptian darkness, and soon discovered a large cart, to which was harnessed a small pony. Several men were in the cart, and a considerable amount of luggage.

"This is not a cab," said Mr. G. turning to the black silk cap. "I told you to bring a cab. We shall never be there in time with this ramshackle affair."

"Where be you a-going, sir? It don't matter to I how far; only set yourself down beside I, and her'll take you in time," pointing to the pony.

"Why, surely you're a Cornishman!" said our guide. "Nobody but a Cornishman would make such a hash of his pronouns."

"Cornishman be I," cried the owner of the equipage, in huge delight. "And proud be I as I comes from Polperrow, over against Fowey" (he called it "Foy"). "Only you trust to I, sir, and you'll be all right. Wheer be you a-going?"

"We have to be at Liverpool Street in three quarters of an hour," said Mr. G., grimly. "That small quadruped would hardly land us there to-morrow morning."

"Why, sir, she be Cornish just as much as I," cried the man, fairly leaping in his excitement. "I'll take you there for five shillings, and if you don't catch your train, don't pay me. Can't say fairer than that!"

"But these men, and this luggage? there's not room for all. The cart would break down."

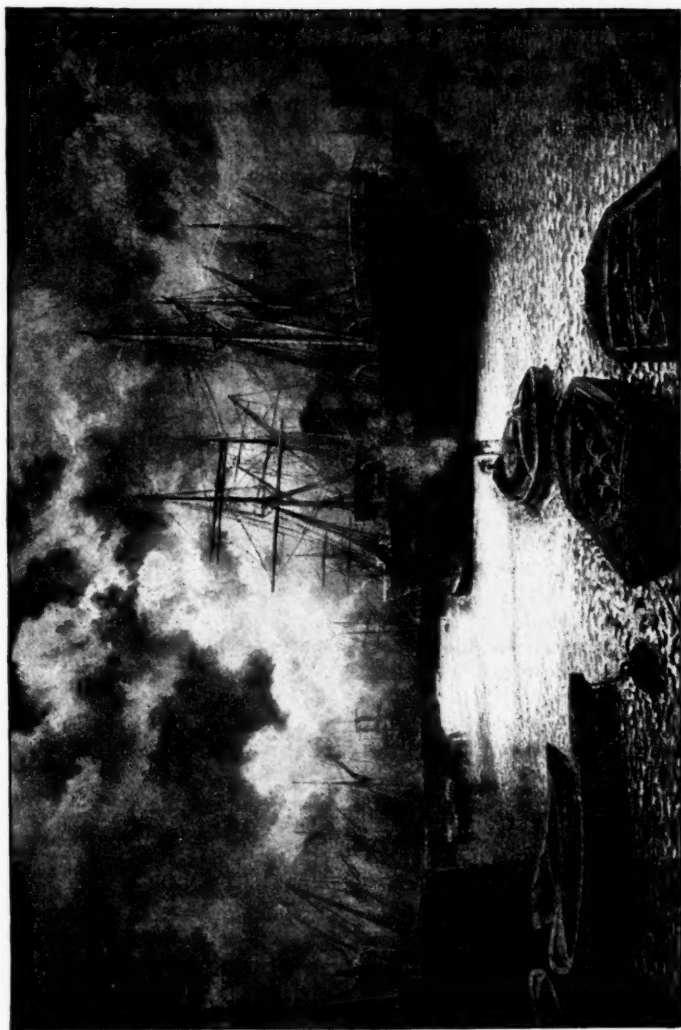
"They're only going to the next station, sir," said the man. "Won't take us two minutes out of our way. Come then; we won't lose no more precious time. Angelina never would stand too much loitering."

"Angelina? who's Angelina?" asked Mr. G.

"Why, her's Angelina," was the reply, pointing to the pony. "And a very angel she be for temper, if ever there was one in horseflesh."

Something in the man's tone seemed familiar to us: we looked at him more closely; the face was familiar also. Then we remembered.

"Why, surely," we said, "you are John Pendragon, and used to live in Falmouth. And once when we were staying with the Rector,



NIGHT-WATCHES ON THE THAMES.

and his coachman was taken ill, you took his place for a week or two?"

"Ay, ay, sir, I did," cried the man, excitedly. "John Pendragon

be I, sure enough. It's a good sixteen year ago, sir, if not more, since I had the honour of driving the Rector. And now I come to look, I du remember you, sir, and the Rector telling me you were more than a son to him. Eh, they was grand times when Mr. Wright was our Rector. The kindest gentleman that ever lived. Eh, sir, it was a sad day for us when he ceased to be Rector. It has been poor times in Falmouth since then. But, sure, now, how small the world is! Who would ever have expected to meet you after so many years—in Paradise Row, too, East end o' London!"

"Stranger things happen every day," we returned. "The world is small, as you say. But, John, though you have added a stone or two to your weight, haven't you rather come down in the world?"

"No, sir, no; I can't say as I have. Of course London isn't Falmouth, sir; and we see more life and more misery here in a day than we do in Falmouth in a lifetime; and we shake hands and rub elbows, as it were, with squalor and crime, and almost seem to be part and parcel of it; but, no, sir, I haven't come down in the world, judging by then and now. I'm married, sir, and have a family, and do well by them all. I keep my head well above water, and put by into the bargain. The wife's thrifty. She be a Cornish woman, too, and was in the service of Miss Anna Maria Fox, sir. You remember Miss Anna Maria, sir? I do remember driving you there twice in one week with Mr. Rector. A good true lady if ever there was one, sir, but I'm afeared now on her last legs.* Eh, how strangely things do fall out, sir, mighty proud we should be if you'd pay a visit to we. The wife did think so much of our old Rector Mr. Wright. So did all Falmouth for the matter of that."

We duly recorded his address, and promised to pay a wedding visit, though sixteen years after the event.

"Come, come," cried Mr. G. whose patience was exhausted. "The best Cornish pony in the world can't perform miracles: and it will be a miracle if we reach Liverpool Street in time, unless you start at once."

It ended in the men and their baggage all getting into the cart, and Mr. G. mounting beside John Pendragon, who a slim youth twenty years ago, was now a strong burly Cornishman, with a curious mixture of the Londoner about him.

And so the wonderful arrangement passed out of the Egyptian darkness of Paradise Row into the garish light of the main thoroughfare. Angelina proved equal to the occasion and rushed them off at a reckless speed. She must have understood the conversation and determined to equal her reputation.

We watched them on their way, and the last we saw of them, John Pendragon was evidently discoursing to his neighbour upon the smallness of the world, the unexpected meetings that turn up in the

* John Pendragon was right. Miss Anna Maria Fox died on the 5th December, 1897.

most out-of-the-way places, and the transcendent merits of the late Rector of Falmouth: the latter indeed a subject in which we heartily joined.

The end of the cavalcade was a success. Angelina carried them



through the long, wide, noisy thoroughfares of the East end to a triumphant issue. They reached Liverpool Street in good time for the train, and Mr. G. had the satisfaction of seeing his charge safely off on their long journey to the Celestial Empire:

When the cavalcade had departed on its way to Liverpool Street, we felt rather like a fish out of water: in the midst of a crowd of houses, a multitude of folk, all was strange and unfamiliar. Involuntarily we turned again into the Egyptian darkness of Paradise Row. The Chinaman was still weighing out opium and his customers had not diminished. A vessel had come in that day, and the men were assembling at their favourite haunt, eager for the smoking so long denied them on the voyage from the Celestial regions. Without our departed guide we would not attempt to re-enter. Of what use? Their English was limited; Chinese was to us an unknown tongue. The labyrinthine lanes and turnings had little attraction in our solitary condition. To go through without our guide was very much like taking up a puzzle to which one has lost the key. We felt rather like a ship without its rudder; and not knowing the neighbourhood, might possibly drift on to unpleasant rocks or quicksands. The lanes were dark enough, and the powers of evil love darkness, and lurk in secret places. Mr. G. had arranged to accompany us some other evening—we would defer further experiences.

In some mysterious manner we found our way out of the labyrinths to the station. A drunken man at the ticket office was trying to persuade the clerk that as a free British subject he had a right to travel without paying his fare. The clerk refused to be converted, and it ended in their opening wide the doors and turning the man out with great noise and resistance. From the calm way in which they acted, it was evident that this was a very ordinary incident.

The train came puffing up from Blackwall, without a passenger; nearly all traffic was over for the night. We passed sundry stations until at Shadwell, the flaring torches reflected upon the water, the dim outlines of vessels, looked so mysterious, picturesque and alluring, that we left the train and asked our way of a substantial constable keeping guard under the railway bridge. "We wanted the river and the ships; a solitary walk in the docks."

He replied with a strong brogue; but it was not Cornwall this time—it was from the far North. He was strong and stalwart, standing a good six feet three in his stockings.

"Yes, sir, I come from the North," said he: "from Northumberland. I used to be in Alnwick, and many a word have I had with the good duke up there. It's a very different life down here. The East end isn't exactly what I should choose, but I'm useful here. They want a man with some presence to keep them in order. I no sooner show myself than many a street brawl takes to its heels and flies like the whirlwind. And if I like to exert it I have a voice that would make anybody shake in his shoes—thunder is child's play to it. Shall I give you a specimen of it?"

We gratefully declined.

"The ships and the water and the docks, sir? The docks are closed. I doubt if you could get in. But there's the canal hard by.

If you take the first turning to the right, and go in at the great gates opposite you, I daresay they will let you through—but they don't as a rule."

The great gates were soon found, and we passed in. A light glimmered in a small office; a keeper looked up, gave a nod at the figure standing in the faint light, then looked down again. That nod evidently meant freedom of the place. We went on. The darkness equalled Paradise Row: but here we were more in the open. It was a mysterious place. A little way off was a huge vessel lighted up by flaring torches. Men going to and fro looked like demons—black as coal. Near us were high walls and heaps of what looked like old iron.

As we wondered which way to turn and whether the next step would plunge us into a cold bath, we heard footsteps approaching. A young man came up and stood beside us. For a moment we thought of all the murders we had heard of, all the secret disappearances; all the bodies found drowned in the river. Here was a grand opportunity for any one intent on plunder, murder and sudden death.

"Do you belong to this place?" we asked, by way of saying something.

"Yes, sir," replied the man. "I work here. I had just turned in to look after my barge, and saw you standing here. I thought you might want some information. People don't stroll in here as a rule out of mere curiosity."

"What are you going to do with your barge?" we asked.

"At midnight I'm going to take her out of the canal into the river, sir, and I just turned in to see that she was all right and ready."

There was something in the man's voice that inspired confidence. We peered into his face in the darkness, and saw that it was an honest face: not at all an East end type; well formed features and outlines. He might almost be of gentle birth. Such a man was to be trusted, and we dismissed all fear of "robbery with violence."

"Are you going to your barge now?"

"Yes, sir."

"May we go with you?"

"With pleasure, sir. But I don't think you'll find much to repay you."

He little knew the picturesqueness and attraction of the river by night, with the outlines of its craft going to and fro.

It was well that we had a guide. The place was full of strange twists and turnings. Now we reached the water's edge without knowing water was there, and now found ourselves crossing the gates of a lock, on which the least false step would have plunged us into freezing depths. We went through long narrow passages between high walls, all dark as Erebus—the very spot for a thrilling murder. Now we came into the open, where there were perfect

mountains of old iron waiting to be taken away. Fortunes are made out of these old iron heaps. Again we came to a lock through which barges were passing. Horses on the tow-path stood waiting, all in solemn darkness.

"This is the Regent's Canal, sir," said our new guide, "and it goes through a great part of England. Just over that embankment is the River Lea. No horses and tow-path there; the men have to use poles. Every barge passing through this lock has to pay for thirty tons: that's the minimum weight. It's a fine thing, sir, this canal, and ought to pay well."

"What do you call yourself?" we asked, surprised to find him so much better than anything one could have expected.

"Me, sir? I'm a lighterman. Nothing very great, sir; but I like it far better than working on land in a warehouse or anything of that sort. I can breathe here, and I love the sky and the water and the river-craft."

"Do you earn much?"

"Well, sir, that's according to what I do. I'm paid by the piece, as they say in the shops, not by the week. Some weeks I earn as much as £3 or more: but there are times when work is slack, and I earn hardly anything. Putting one with another, I do very well."

"What's your name?"

"Jim Dixon, sir, at your service."

"And do you belong to this East end of London, Mr. Jim?"

"Well, yes, sir, inasmuch as I've lived here for twelve years. I am twenty-four now, and I was twelve when we came. My father and mother didn't belong to the place. They were a sort of gentle-folk once upon a time; but father went wrong; embezzled money, and had to take the consequences. It was others made him do it more than himself, but he was the one to suffer. When he was free again, and ruined, he got a place as clerk in the East India Docks, and there he stayed till he died four years ago."

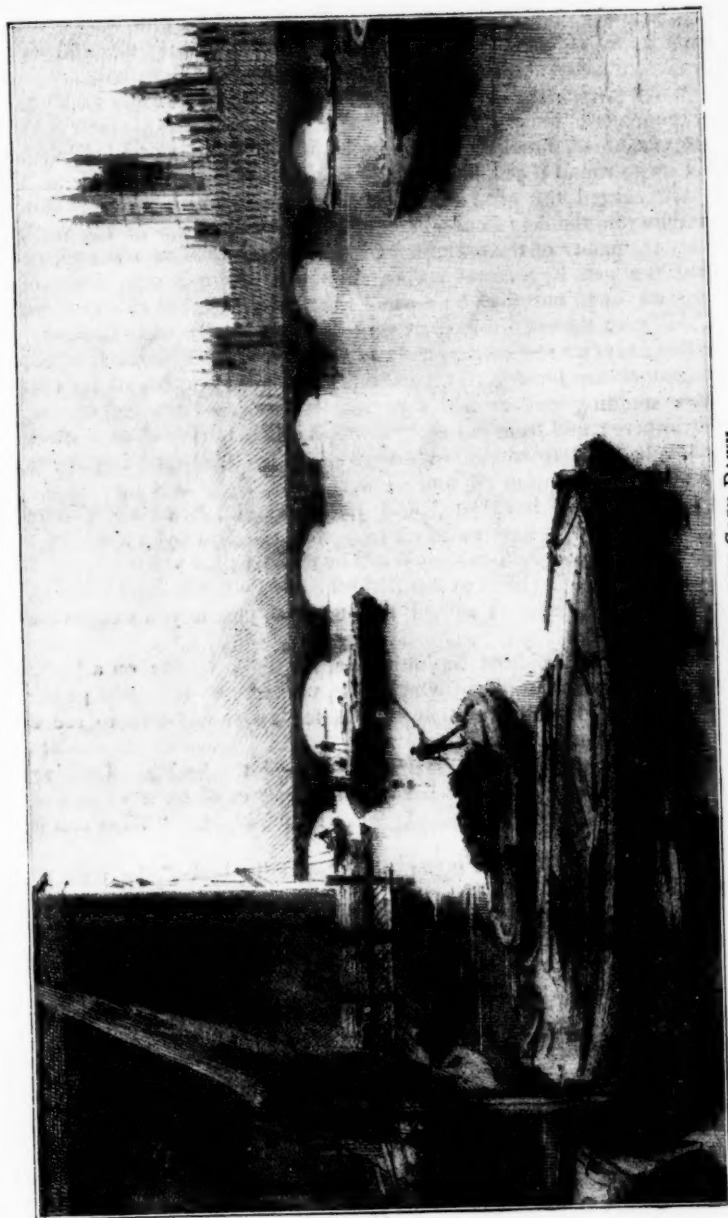
"And your mother?"

"She's living, and I support her and take care that she wants for nothing. I've not had much education, as you may suppose, and I don't suppose I shall ever be much more than I am now: but I must be content."

The canal was behind us. The barges that had slowly gone through the locks were gliding slowly onwards through the night darkness. If we had climbed the embankment we might have looked down upon the River Lea. Before us was a large open sheet of water: the basin lying between the Canal and the Thames. To the right the torches were still glaring, the demons still running to and fro.

"She has been unloading," said Jim Dixon, "and has just finished. In a few minutes you will see the lights go out."

They did so, almost as he spoke. All sign of the demons



WESTMINSTER—IN THE GREY DAWN.

disappeared ; whether they went off to Pandemonium, or to haunts not quite so far off, there was nothing to show. Everything was steeped in profound darkness ; and there was silence as well as darkness.

"But where's the Thames?" we asked, for as yet we saw no signs of the majestic stream.

"Out there, sir ; beyond the basin and the bridge and the locks. Let us go round if you like."

We skirted the edge of the basin, once or twice just escaping tumbling in, thanks to our guide, who knew every inch of the road, every inequality of the ground. Crossing the bridge at the end, he opened a gate by a secret spring, and going down a steep flight of steps we found ourselves on a small wharf, looking upon the Thames. A brilliant light upon the wharf shot its rays right over the river, and in these rays we saw barges passing to and fro, some towards London, others outward bound. There was much craft at anchor, all its outlines standing out against the clear night sky. Silence reigned everywhere : and from out that silence, a neighbouring church clock suddenly tolled midnight. We were startled. It seemed impossible that time had so worn on, and we were in the Night-Watches.

"Didn't think it so late," said James Dixon ; "had no idea of the hour. I shall have to go off to my barge. Have you a mind for a short voyage, sir? I daresay it will be the first time you have passed from the Regent's Canal to the River Thames. In the dead of night, too, and on a barge. I should like to take you if you would care to come."

We said yes, without hesitating ; a midnight voyage on a barge would be a new sensation. Our guide, too, was so strangely gentle and thoughtful for his station, that we felt we should like to see a little of his every-day work.

So we turned from the wharf, and crossed the bridge. Looking over for a moment, we saw what looked like acres of some white and precious metal, gleaming and glittering in the night. "What can it be?" we said.

Jim Dixon laughed. "Not quite what it looks," he replied. "Neither gold nor silver nor precious stones ; though when I first saw it I thought it was all three. It is nothing but remnants of tin, but it is new, and it means lots of money. There it lies, and when that goes, another lot will take its place."

Again we skirted the basin, and presently crossed the lock, and at the other end came to Jim Dixon's barge, with her mast reclining and her sail furled : altogether a thing of beauty.

"What is her name?" we asked.

"The *Angelina*, sir."

We quite started. Were we going to be haunted by this ridiculous name? "Surely you're joking?" we cried.

"Why, sir?" asked Jim in surprise, who knew nothing of our earlier doings of that night. "Why, sir? I hate the name, though I

suppose one name's as good as another. But it makes me laugh, and I call her the Black Angel. Angelina's her name, sure enough. What do you think was the name of my last barge?"

We could not guess.

"It was christened *The Devil on Two Sticks*: and mother said I had gone straight from Pandemonium to Paradise. It was an unlucky name though, for she went to the bottom. A brig ran into her at the mouth of the Thames and cut her clean in two. Down she went, and there she lies, with the mermaids at the bottom of the deep blue sea."

"Were you on board her at the time?"

"No, thank heaven; for her skipper was cut in two and went to the bottom with her. I should have left my poor old mother to mourn me; but he left a wife and half a dozen young ones. They got up a subscription for her, and she's doing well in a shop in the West India Docks Road."

By this time the front gates of the lock were open, and we passed in. Then they were closed and the other gates were opened and we passed out into the broad basin. Our progress was slow but sure. The stars shone down upon us. Not a thing was moving beyond ourselves: not a sound was heard. Absolute stillness and repose reigned. Finally we passed out into the river. Two o'clock had struck; the Night Watches were advancing. On either side the river the banks were in darkness. All work was suspended; all lights were out; only here and there a solitary gleam betrayed a night watcher: or perhaps one whose watch had been overtaken by sleep. We moved down slowly with the tide. Under the night sky all the outlines upon the banks looked mysterious and picturesque. Dark shadows lay upon the surface of the water. Now and then we passed a barge toiling upwards, and Dixon and the bargeman exchanged greetings, almost startling the night air.

"My life is very much what you see it, sir," said Jim. "Many and many a time do I have to bring my barge out in the dead of night. Sometimes it's midnight, sometimes one o'clock, sometimes two; then I have my turn of broad daylight. I like the day very well; but I like the night best. It's all so quiet; nothing to bother you. And you so thoroughly enjoy your breakfast next morning. A life in a warehouse would be poor sport after this."

It was evident that he was susceptible to the higher influence, though no doubt unconsciously so. Born to somewhat better things, his nature asserted itself in this silent manner. There was something finer and nobler in piloting a craft up and down stream through the daylight hours or under the night sky than in spending life working in the crowded streets and tainted atmosphere and overwhelming bricks and mortar of the City courts and windings. It was impossible to know James Dixon the lighterman, even for an hour, and not hope that things would go well with him; life carry

him on to a successful issue, developing the higher nature as time went on. Yet amidst the daily scenes and influences that surrounded him, how much there was to warp him in a contrary direction; the tendency downwards, evil abounding to right and left, good a fable to be read or dreamed about, beautiful in fancy, but not existing.

We moved slowly, but time went on, and so did we. The grey dawn broke in the east as we reached Blackwall. A mist hung over the river, just sufficient to veil and soften all outlines without concealing them. The scene was wonderfully picturesque and romantic. The commonplace world had passed away; this was fairyland. The grey light of early morning lay upon the river hurrying to the sea; the stars had paled in the sky, only one large planet remaining until the sun should shoot up and extinguish it. Beyond the locks of Blackwall, within the basin, huge vessels were moored, biding their time to go to the further ends of the earth. Conspicuous amongst them were the grey sides and red funnels of the Castle Packet steamers, bound for that land that is now under a cloud—South Africa.

We had come down the river when the Night Watches were giving place to the early Morning Watch, and seen once more how at least one section of the human crowd earns its daily bread. As we had gone down the dark river the experience was a very pleasant one. The stars overhead shone pure and cold; the magic outlines of the barge sketched themselves against the night sky; a fresh exhilarating breeze blew up from the sea, dissipating, as it seemed, the fumes of those opium-haunted dens which would linger in the memory—and to which we were under contract to return. It seemed ages since we had been there. This was the happier recollection.

And looking at James Dixon's face by daylight, we saw that it was even finer and better than it had seemed in the darkness; more virtues were there; a simple steadfastness of purpose, an honesty of intention; an absence of self-seeking that delighted one in the meeting therewith. But, alas, he was only twenty-two. What would the next ten years, the next twenty years bring forth? What changes for good or bad upon that now admirable countenance, the clear depths of those large grey eyes, that direct honesty of expression? That is a question time alone can solve. There he is on his barge—now one barge, now another—and there he goes up and down the river, and the reader may find him out for himself and watch the development of the problem.

Our journey was over. We had to bid Dixon and his barge good-bye, and go back to town and prosy civilisation by the early train.

"It's been a jolly trip, sir," said the lighterman. "I don't have any company on board. Won't you come again some time?"

"Yes," we replied, "that we will; but it must be when nights are warmer and summer breezes blow. In the meantime, give us your address, and when we are in the East end, we will pay your old mother a visit, and ask how the world goes with you."

"Ay, sir, that would give the old lady rare pleasure, not to speak of mine. You'll find her a better sort than I am."

We really doubted that. It was long since we had met a man in that state of life who seemed to us so altogether worthy, single-hearted, open-minded as James Dixon the lighterman. We returned the friendly grasp of his hand and felt that any one might do the same with honour to himself.

We turned to the shore. The train waiting in the Blackwall Station had given its warning, when just at that very moment up came a steam launch, and in it we recognised an old pilot who had more than once been in command when we had gone down Channel. He knew us and saluted.

"You are up betimes, sir," he remarked. "It has just gone six bells. Are you bound for town? If so will you not run up stream with us, rather than take a dull journey by rail through that wilderness of houses?"

"Where would you land us, Mr. Hurst?"

"Where you will, sir," was the reply. "We are in no hurry and for the moment are masters of our craft. You shall be landed this side London Bridge, if it please you, or at Westminster Stairs if you have a mind for going through the bridges."

It needed no second thought. We gave up the train and took the launch. In a few minutes the *Angelina* and Jim Dixon had faded into dim outlines.

In the grey morning we found ourselves going up the river, all its well-known, much-loved sights and sounds beautiful and striking in the early morning light. In the distance Greenwich reared its stately head. Great vessels were passing into the docks. All sorts of craft crowded the surface. Barges were passing up and down loaded with hay. Here and there lamps still glimmered on the banks, put to shame by the growing daylight. Night-work was over, day-work had begun; one heard the sound of the hammer and anvil, the tap-tap of men building or repairing ships in dry dock. One well-known point after another was passed. Billingsgate, with a crowd of small vessels at its wharf; the Custom House, so close to Billingsgate that it rejoices in the odour of fish—which half suffocates us on approaching the Market. Then came London Bridge, stretching across the water, already crowded with traffic. Beside it the Monument reared its flaming head: beyond it uprose St. Paul's in all its grandeur and dignity. One bridge after another was passed. Westminster stood before us, that dream of modern architecture rising with its towers and pinnacles against the sky. The launch steered for the stately steps, scene of many a pageant, and we stepped on dry land just as Big Ben rang out what our friend the pilot would have called eight bells. The Night Watches and the Morning Watch were over; the sun was already climbing the sky; the world had awakened to a new day.

COLONEL MALLORY.

I.

MESS was over, and some half-dozen of us were sitting under the verandah, enjoying our after-dinner smoke, thankful for the beautiful night which so often, in India, follows a hot day.

"Won't you give us a story, Major," at length said one of the youngsters, addressing our junior Major, Crawford, one of the best fellows in the service. The request was repeated from all sides.

Crawford looked up. "Well, perhaps I will," he said, good-naturedly; "for, curiously enough, I was just thinking of an adventure I once had, which might prove interesting to some of you."

Noticing that Crawford paused, our chief, who was also present, said, "Never mind me, Major! if your present story is as good as some you have told, we shall all enjoy it thoroughly." And thus encouraged, Crawford lit a fresh cheroot and began.

I had been nine or ten years in the Service without taking home-leave; had gone to Ceylon and Burmah, and even made a run to the Colonies, feeling quite satisfied with these changes. But at last a desire to see the "old country" came over me, increased by the fact that as my friend Bolton, of the "Queen's Bays," was taking furlough, we could go home together. Not that I had any particular attraction towards England, for my relatives there were more so in name than anything else. I had been an only child, and my parents, who had neither brothers nor sisters, had died while I was still young.

The necessary leave having been granted, we started Westward; but I shall spare you details of our journey. Some of you have, no doubt, had recent experiences, while others are eagerly looking forward to them. Arrived in London, we spent three or four weeks pleasantly enough; sight-seeing during the day, with theatre or concert at night. This, however, became tiresome after a time, and the question arose what we should do next; for Bolton, like myself, was a solitary man, and although he had some distant relatives in the North, he apparently had no very anxious desire to visit them.

Thinking over this state of matters, I remembered my former guardian, whose acquaintance I had not kept up as I ought, letter-writing not being one of my strong points. Sir John Curran was an Irish landed proprietor, at whose place in Galway I had spent many of my holidays very happily. I now wrote to him, asking if he was at home, telling him I had taken a few months' leave, and was presently in London with a friend who had accompanied me from India.

By return of post I had a most kind reply, in which he said: "Come as soon as you can, bring your friend with you, and make this your home while in the country. You will find things much as when you left. Lady Curran will be delighted to see her old favourite. Emma and Lucy, whom you left as girls in the nursery, are, of course, quite young ladies now. Harry is almost eighteen, and the only stranger is Mary, a little vixen of seven, who already expresses a feminine curiosity to see you. You remember the old house well enough to know there is plenty of room; and in case you and your friend may be afraid of finding it 'slow,' I can promise you plenty of sport. We are also to have other visitors, so there will be no fear on that score. Let us know when to expect you—you can't have forgotten the way—and Harry shall meet you; we have a station now only three miles off."

II.

HAVING nothing to keep us in town, we arranged to visit Sir John at once, and duly arrived at Rushdown. Here we were met by Harry, and I should never have recognised in the tall, handsome looking youth who was waiting, the little boy I had left years before.

As we drove along, Harry pointing out to Bolton, who sat beside him, the various objects of interest on the route, I could not help thinking how much had happened since I last looked on the same landscape, which appeared unchanged, except that perhaps the timber looked a little larger. There were the hills where I had knocked over many a bird, the lake too on which I had so often sailed, and so frequently made good "baskets." What changes was I likely to find in the Currans themselves, and what alteration would they see in me?

As we rushed through the Lodge gate, I recognised the old woman who had been there before I left, and who was looking much the same. She smiled in the most hearty manner, but was evidently puzzled whether Bolton or I was the "young gentleman" she remembered; so she beamed on both.

We were not long driving up the avenue, and as we approached the house, I saw my old friend and his wife standing on the steps waiting to welcome us.

Upon the whole they were less changed than I had expected. He was quite grey now, but fresh and vigorous looking, while Lady Curran seemed only somewhat more matronly, but as comely and pleasant as ever.

Mutual congratulations over, and the necessary introduction in Bolton's case, we proceeded indoors, Lady Curran leading the way to the drawing-room. "You must see the rest of the family," she said; "I don't think you would now recognise the two wild girls you used

to romp with before you went to India." And certainly in the apparently demure young ladies who now came forward, I should *not* have recognised my two former torments.

Emma, the elder, was tall, dark in complexion, with clear, hazel eyes; altogether a very handsome girl, inclined I thought at this first meeting, to be somewhat reserved, and with an absence of that ease of manner which Lucy, her younger sister, seemed to possess in a remarkable degree, and which made a stranger feel at once at home with her. She was not, critically, as handsome as her sister, although more winning, I thought. Her hair was brown, her eyes grey, and a constant smile seemed to play on her frank and pleasant face. Beside them was their younger sister, evidently spoiled by the whole family, and yet a nice little girl, full of fun and mischief.

We soon retired to dress for dinner. Bolton's room was not far from mine, and as we again sought the drawing-room together, we congratulated ourselves on the pleasant change we had made from hotel life, as well as the prospect of agreeable society and good sport into the bargain.

Sir John apologised at having no one to meet us, adding: "But I thought you would not object to at least one evening alone with us after such an absence, that we might hear all your news. You have been such a bad correspondent that we really know very little of your doings."

I assured him he could not have made an arrangement more to my mind. I also expressed my regret at being so neglectful in writing; but at this he stopped me, saying he also was to blame, but that it was all right now, seeing I was once more amongst them.

By the time dinner was over we were all on as easy terms as if we had met daily for years; so soon can the thread of old friendship be taken up. Even Bolton seemed to share in the general feeling, and appeared as much at home as if he had known the Currans all his life.

III.

WE spent a very pleasant time of it, hunting, fishing, shooting, and in many of our expeditions were accompanied by the young ladies. They were both excellent horse-women; felt almost as much interest as ourselves as to the result of a day on the lake; and although they rather objected to a day amongst the heather, they would often meet us at some spot where we had arranged to have luncheon. On such occasions it generally turned out that sport for that day was over, as we preferred, after lingering over the meal, to stroll leisurely home in the company of our fair friends, to again resuming our search for game.

Harry, like most young men, was an ardent sportsman, and, being

generally of the party the "proprieties" were duly observed. Sir John did not often accompany us. He was out of training, he said, and, besides, had his duties in looking over the property, the greater part of which was in his own hands. The girls had been accustomed to great freedom, and their mother did not trouble herself about them. "They will be all right with you, Charlie," she used to say to me when we had arranged some excursion or other, and she was quite pleased to remain at home attending to household matters.

The evenings passed pleasantly with music and other amusements, and I began to notice that somehow or other Bolton generally monopolised Emma at the piano, as well as in our walks; while, whether the result of this or for some other reason, Lucy and I were a good deal thrown together. Our host and hostess did not seem to notice anything strange in this. Apparently they thought it the most natural thing in the world that the girls and I should recur to our former intimacy, and it was only to be expected that, while I made one a constant companion, I should see that my friend was not left to wander about alone.

Things went on in this way for two or three weeks, when one morning at breakfast the letter-bag was as usual brought in, and amongst the communications for Sir John there seemed one which annoyed him a little.

Noticing his expression, his wife said, "What is it, my dear? Nothing wrong, I hope?"

"Oh, no," he replied, recovering himself, "only a little awkward. You know that as we are to have some people with us the next day or two, and a dinner-party every night, our hands are pretty full, and here is a note from Colonel Mallory saying he and Mrs. Mallory will give us a couple of days on their way homewards, and that will just bring them here when the party takes place."

"Well, it can't be helped," said Lady Curran; "we have plenty of room, and I am sure I shall be very glad to see Mrs. Mallory."

"Yes, yes," said her husband, "she is well enough, and Mallory is not a bad fellow either; but," turning to Bolton and myself, "he has some peculiar ideas which somewhat unfit him for general company."

From further conversation it turned out that Mallory had in his younger days mixed a good deal in society; had seen some service, and was of a good old family. For some years, however, he had been careless as to his personal appearance, and had withdrawn to his property amongst the wilds of Kerry. There he went about and did very much as he liked, and the feeling of having only himself to please had grown to such an extent that he seemed to care very little what other people thought or might feel from his peculiarities when he occasionally visited civilised society: I confess I felt some curiosity to see the Colonel.

IV.

As we knew the ladies would have a good deal to do preparing for the expected guests, we kept out of the way on the day of the Thursday dinner-party, only returning in time to dress. We therefore saw none of the arrivals till we joined the other guests in the drawing-room before dinner.

On entering the room, I was making as usual for my point of attraction, but found myself on this occasion forestalled, the ground being occupied by a young neighbouring squire, and Mr. Pleader, Q.C., who, with the usual self-confidence, had also the acquired nonchalance of a legal practitioner.

I fancied both these men paid Lucy more than merely formal attentions, and were beginning to imagine that I might possibly be a rival. Neither however seemed to think I should be a formidable one. Irish girls might like a "red coat," as most girls do, but I was only a temporary obstruction; besides, Sir John and Lady Curran would probably have the real deciding of the matter, and there was little chance—each thought—that a poor calvary "sub." could successfully compete with a probably future ornament of the Irish Bench, or with a man who might, some day, represent the county.

Mary and I had always been great friends, and she now came to my aid. She was beside her sister, and seeing me so far away from my usual post (for I had passed to another part of the room) she broke out of the circle, and running up to me said, "Come along, Mr. Crawford, you can have my place." This was beside Lucy in a window-seat.

Although, of course, I could not exactly take the vacancy made by my young friend, it enabled me to break the ring which had hitherto prevented my nearer approach, and to put me on a par with the others. This put me in good spirits, and, drawing a chair, I soon had the little girl on my knee, chatting away about the people in the room.

She was a restless creature, and, moving backwards and forwards as she did, came into violent collision with the front of my shirt, which, according to custom, occupied a conspicuous portion of my evening dress.

Lucy having cautioned her by saying, "Mary, do be careful; see how you are spoiling Mr. Crawford's shirt front!" the child's attention seemed suddenly arrested by the expanse of linen, and from me she looked at all the other gentlemen to see if they were equally radiant.

My eyes followed hers, till they rested on a good-looking man talking energetically to the M.P. for the county, and who I wondered I had not noticed before.

It must be Colonel Mallory, thought I, for there was no attempt

at outward adornment, scarcely even the "get up" for a morning call. No white collar broke the dark expanse; something there was beyond the neck-tie, but it was undefined. The vest was high: even a little colour there would have relieved the darkness. What was underneath was concealed by a black mass, only relieved by a pearl-headed breast-pin. No cuffs appeared; the Colonel was evidently a man who despised conventionalities. The collar that appeared was no doubt part of the flannel shirt which he undoubtedly wore.

Contrasting for a moment the Colonel's sombre front with the white expanse exhibited by the other gentlemen in the room, Mary said to me:

"Why does Colonel Mallory wear a flannel shirt, and not one like you and the others?"

I don't know what mischief possessed me, but, carried away for the moment by some unfortunate impulse, I replied:

"Well, I will tell you. The Colonel has only that one shirt, so he is obliged to be careful."

"But how does he do when it requires to be washed?" asked the practical little lady.

"Oh," said I, "in the cold weather he goes to bed while it is being washed, and in summer he takes himself to the river and lives with the salmon."

Mary was greatly pleased with this story; but suddenly, to my horror, she flew from me, saying:

"I will tell the Colonel; won't he laugh too?"

He will do anything but laugh, I thought to myself, and tried to detain her; but she was too quick, and in less time than I take to tell you, she was beside the Colonel, saying:

"Colonel Mallory, Mr. Crawford has been telling me such a funny story about you, and why you do not dress like the other gentlemen."

Fortunately much of this was lost to the general company, as dinner was just then announced, and in the confusion of the moment I was in hopes the thing would be overlooked and forgotten.

I had time, however, to notice Mallory give me a very black look, and also that a pleased expression passed over Mr. Pelham's face, as if he had secured a piece of evidence which he would be able to bring against me, with damaging effect, on the first favourable opportunity. However, as I had managed to get Lucy for my dinner partner, I allowed the thing to pass, and gave myself up to the enjoyment of the moment.

As we were placed, the Colonel was on the opposite side of the table from me, nearer our host; not far from me was Bolton; on Lucy's other side was the squire, while on one side of our hostess sat the legal luminary.

I could not help thinking that, although I had "passed in tactics," I was being out-manceuvred by the lawyer. For however pleasant it might be to sit next the young lady, still, as being at the centre

of authority, as it were, he occupied a much stronger position, and one from which he could act with all the advantage of paying court to the parents. But fortunately for my comfort and appetite, I did not imagine the advantage to which he would so soon be able to put his position and knowledge.

V.

THE dinner passed, as such dinners generally do, and with dessert came Miss Mary, who, as was natural, went at once to her mother. I soon observed Mr. Pelham supplying her with good things, and doing his best to ingratiate himself with her.

After a time, to my consternation, I heard him say, "What pretty story was that you said Mr. Crawford had told you before dinner?"

I was too far off to be able to signal to the child not to betray me, even if she would have understood; and my heart stood still, waiting for her reply.

"Yes," she cried, "it was such a funny story about why Colonel Mallory does not dress like the other gentlemen."

My face must have shown my perplexity and annoyance; also how completely I was at the mercy of the questioner. As, however, there is seldom "quarter" in love or war, I knew I had nothing to hope for now, and only trusted the agony would be short.

It was not long, for the mention of "the Colonel" and the child's voice having drawn attention to that part of the table, one of those awkward silences took place, which one sometimes finds comes over a company.

Before the "hush" came, the lawyer had followed up his former question, by saying in his most insinuating manner, "And what did Mr. Crawford say?"

Mary began to tell my story, and as she proceeded, evidently pleased at the opportunity of hearing herself speak, and that so many were listening, a silence like death came over the company, no one knowing where to look or what to do.

For myself, I could have sunk into the earth, but I was not long in recovering, and looking at the supreme blankness of Bolton's expression, almost made me laugh. On venturing to extend my gaze, I saw Lady Curran flushed and vexed-looking, while her husband was purple with suppressed anger; and as my unfortunate narrative was unfolded, his looks travelled from Mary to me and seemed to say, "You are a nice fellow, not only to insult one of my guests and friends in this way, but actually to make my own child the medium of your ill-considered folly."

The silence which followed Mary's story was broken by Colonel Mallory starting from his chair and saying, "I never thought, Curran, I should have been insulted in your house; I had always expected to

meet gentlemen there. I don't know how you feel, but I know I shall not sit at the same table with a man who could invent such falsehoods; yes, mark the word, falsehoods. If I could leave the house to-night, I would do it rather than be under the same roof with him; but I shall retire to my room; there, at any rate, I shall be free from further annoyance." Then turning to me, he added, "You will hear more about this, sir; nobody insults Pat Mallory without answering for it," and with this he left the room.

Mrs. Mallory also rose, saying to Lady Curran, "I think I had better follow the Colonel," adding, as she looked at me, "I won't say, sir, you had no provocation for your remarks, although they were certainly ill-timed and ill-judged; but this I must say, that you are altogether wrong as to my husband's wardrobe; for while I won't deny his shirts *are* flannel, I can tell you he has enough to clothe your troop, if ever you get one;" and with this shot she sailed from the room, the other ladies going also. As Lucy paused, she whispered, "*How could you!*" I think I felt this more than anything.

The departure of the ladies did not do much to improve matters. An awkward consciousness hung over us all.

Sir Thomas Blake (the county member) tried to turn attention to politics, but even that usually interesting subject did not receive the customary attention. Sir John Curran still looked annoyed. Bolton added to my discomfort by saying, aside, in the most sympathetic manner, "Well, old fellow, you have certainly put your foot in it this time."

After some rather disjointed conversation, Sir John suddenly said: "By-the-bye, Crawford" (not "Charlie" as it always had been), "what time does your train leave to-morrow? I think you said you would need to be off early, and it will be necessary to drive to the junction, for there is nothing from Rushdown before noon."

I had never said anything about going, but I saw at once it was a gentle hint to clear out. I felt sorry that my old friend should throw me over in this manner, but of course he was not to know how I had developed during all these years of absence; and, after all, I might not be all I looked, or should be. No doubt also I had behaved foolishly and laid myself open to rebuke. Still it was hard to be, metaphorically, kicked out, all the more so when I had hoped that, when I did leave, it might have been under very different circumstances, and perhaps with Lucy at my side.

Taking the cue, however, from Sir John at once, I said, "Yes, I should prefer to leave by the first train, but after what had fallen from Colonel Mallory, I thought it would be better to postpone my departure till the forenoon at least. If I left by the early train, it might look like running away, and I should not wish such an idea to arise."

"Well, please yourself," he said. "Harry will take you to the station any time after you have arranged your plans."

I noticed Bolton seemed rather taken aback when my departure was mentioned, but he appeared suddenly to see what was meant, and a ghastly smile spread itself over his countenance. He had imagined, for a moment, that he might have to leave also. However, his anxiety was soon relieved by Sir John saying, "I don't suppose you have to go, Bolton; it won't do for both of you to leave us so hurriedly."

"Thanks!" said my friend, "Crawford and I have not finally arranged matters, but I think I can remain a few days longer."

A move was soon made to the drawing-room.

I had determined, if possible, to see Lucy and know my fate, as should her reply give me no hope, I should leave without the regret which I must otherwise have carried with me; while, if I thought there was hope, I determined to find ways and means, if possible, to regain the favour of her parents, and to prosecute my suit to a successful issue in the face of all obstacles.

I mentioned my intention to Bolton, asking him to give me what assistance he could in helping me to a chance of speaking to Lucy alone. And aid me he did; for I had just got her to myself for a moment, when Pelham and the Squire made towards us, but not before Bolton had called them aside to decide a dispute he was apparently having with Emma. She, also, seemed to enter into the spirit of the thing, as she took the lawyer in hand; and however easy he might have found it to shake Bolton off, the lady was too much for him.

What passed between us, it is unnecessary to mention, but as I enjoyed my cigar alone on the lawn—for I did not care to join the others in the smoking-room, where they had adjourned when the ladies retired—I felt that it was a day not to be forgotten; for, while I had made a most unfortunate blunder, I had also the consolation of knowing that Lucy was not indifferent to my success in regaining her parents' good opinion.

VI.

I HAD not been long in my room before a knock came to the door, and Bolton entered.

"You are here at last," he said. "Curran has been looking for you everywhere, and, not finding you, came to me as next best, so as to have matters arranged. He was sure you would ask me to act for you, so it really did not make much difference. I need scarcely tell you Mallory wants you to 'meet' him, for you must remember we are in Ireland, and fifty years behind the idea that things can be settled otherwise than after this fashion. I know, of course, we are risking our commissions if it comes out; but what can be done, the old fellow is thirsting for revenge!"

Here the whole idea seemed so ridiculous to him that he lay back in his chair and laughed heartily.

"To think it has come to this!" he said. "What will the regiment think when they hear of it?"

"Never mind what they will think or say," I replied; "it won't help us here; but tell me what arrangements you have made?"

"Well," said he, "I don't like the idea of a court-martial; but I don't suppose that, under the circumstances, you wish to shoot your man; while, if you fall, that will settle the question as to your being tried, and I daresay I should get out of it somehow."

"Thank you," I returned. "You have certainly looked at the matter in a most comprehensive manner. Give me all the other particulars."

"Curran seemed rather put about bringing the message," continued Bolton, "but, as he said, what else could he do! The Colonel was an old friend, had been insulted in his house, and knew none of the other men well enough to ask them to act for him; his acting also kept the thing quieter than if a stranger had been called in. I chose pistols, and you meet to-morrow at half-past seven o'clock, at the back of the boat-house. The hour is late, but it was considered advisable not to be moving too early, and so avoid suspicion. As it is, we shall be supposed to be going for a sail before breakfast, and this idea must be maintained if possible."

I thanked him for all he had done; and, after some further talk, which carried us years back and through many strange scenes, we parted, as it was late, or rather early, and I had some letters to write. One was to my man of business, with instructions as to how I wished my affairs disposed of, and another to Sir John Curran, thanking him for past kindness, expressing regret that a stupid joke of mine should have had such unfortunate results, and entirely exonerating him from any blame, whatever might happen. I thought of writing to Lucy, but my better judgment was against doing so. If I fell, the best thing for her was to forget me; why, therefore, should I try to deepen any impression which perhaps would be better effaced.

Bolton found me dressed and waiting when he came to my room in the morning. Without much thought I had put on my boating costume, the better to carry out the idea of a water expedition. Seeing me so dressed, he asked:

"Are you going in that rig?"

"Yes," I said. "Why not?"

"Oh, nothing. Only I had not expected it. You like a joke to the last, I see."

As we had little time to spare, I did not ask him what he meant, and we made our way to the rendezvous, being the first on the ground, I was pleased to note; the others were not long after us.

When the Colonel was near enough to get a good view of me, he advanced, apparently under considerable excitement, and said:

"Do you wish to insult me further, sir?"

"How?" said I.

"Why," replied he, "is it usual to come out on an occasion like this in a flannel shirt?" and then it at once struck me that my boating costume had aroused his anger. Sir John Curran coming up at the same moment, seemed to catch the point, and dropping the pistol-case, laughed heartily, saying:

"Well, Colonel, whether he hits you or not afterwards, he has certainly made a hit in his dress."

Recovering from my surprise at the Colonel's attack, I said:

"It is not usual on occasions like this for principals to communicate so directly, but as you have addressed me, I shall merely say in reply, that, if you consider I am insulting you by wearing a flannel shirt at a meeting of this kind, what am I and others to consider *your* behaviour in thinking such a garment good enough to dine with us in?"

Instead of the increased rage which I had expected the Colonel to show, he seemed suddenly struck with a new idea, and, to my astonishment, came forward with extended hand, saying:

"I see it all now; what a bear I have been. You put it in quite a new light. Often has my good wife tried to show me that it was not on my own account, but for the sake of others I should comply with the usages of society; but I seem to have been blinded by selfishness, and I daresay given Mrs. Mallory many a sad heart. But," he added, "I asked you to meet me, and shall certainly not creep out of the challenge this way," and turning to Curran, "I am quite ready now."

"Colonel," said I, "we had better carry the irregularity a little further. I have no hesitation in saying, after what has fallen from you, that I regret exceedingly having been so foolish yesterday; at the same time I have no desire to deprive you of the morning's work you expected, and am quite willing to receive your fire."

"This is splendid," said Sir John, "shake hands both of you; it's the best morning's work I have had for a long time." And, coming to me, he continued, "Forgive me, Charlie, for being so hard upon you, but I was horribly vexed and annoyed at the time, all the more that one of my family, although only Mary, should have been the means of placing an old friend in so awkward a position. I assure you I also have had a miserable night of it. Lady Curran guessed something was on the tapis, and she has been lecturing me on my harshness to you: 'almost bringing him up, and then turning him out of doors,' she said, 'for a joke which the Colonel laid himself open to by his selfish peculiarities.'"

We now proceeded to the house (the pistols being hidden away in the boat shed) all on the most friendly terms, the Colonel and I leading the way. As we approached, we noticed the company were assembling for breakfast. They were standing in groups about the

large bay windows evidently labouring under excitement, for, somehow or other, the intended meeting must have leaked out. Mrs. Curran was flushed and distressed-looking, Lucy pale and anxious, while Mrs. Mallory was so excited she could not remain indoors, but came running to meet us, and was not satisfied until assured by her husband that he was not only "all right," but "also," he added, "a better man than ever."

We soon settled down. When the meal was about over, I rose and said, "Sir John, last night a foolish and ill-judged story of mine, told before you all, gave pain to Colonel Mallory. Before the same company I beg to express my regret for having given the Colonel such annoyance, and to apologise for my remarks."

On the conclusion of this little speech there was some commotion, above which Sir John's voice was heard calling out, "Well done, Charlie, that's said like a gentleman."

The Colonel next stood up, saying "I accept your apology, Mr. Crawford, with the greatest pleasure and goodwill. We know each other better than we did last night, and I have received a lesson which I shall take care not to forget."

The breakfast-party soon afterwards broke up, and I heard the Colonel asking if he could have the carriage for the day, as he and Mrs. Mallory wished to go to Innisdown and would be absent several hours; not to expect them at luncheon; but they would be sure to be in time for dinner.

VII.

As I was moving off, Sir John Curran said, "Come into the library, I want to speak to you for a minute."

After some kinds remarks on what had so recently taken place, and hopes that after our mutual explanations things would go on as before and that I would remain on, he continued: "It is no secret or breach of confidence I want, but I may tell you that your friend Bolton has requested an interview with me this morning, and, from what my wife says, I have a good idea what it is about. Now although I like what I have seen of him, besides his being your friend, still I wish to know something more about one to whom I may give my daughter: is he the sort of man to make her happy?"

"There is not a better fellow living," cried I. "If I had fifty sisters I'd give them all to him."

"Possibly he might object to a plurality of wives," laughed Sir John. "But that is enough. I am always pleased to see good fellows getting married and settling down."

Now is my chance I thought, so I said: "I have some idea of marrying myself, Sir John."

"Glad to hear it, my boy; when does it come off?"

"Oh," replied I, "I have not got quite so far ahead as that."

"How?" said he, "have you not spoken to the lady?"

"Yes, in a way," I answered; but it is her parents and especially her father, who I fear may not consent."

"Why, how is that?" he asked; "if he wants a guarantee or reference, send him to me."

"Would you really say a good word for me!" said I.

"Well," replied Sir John, "I would just tell him that if you had asked for one of my own daughters I would not have refused, and surely that should satisfy anyone."

"If you would do that, Sir John," I cried, "the matter is settled, for it is your own daughter Lucy I am thinking of."

He looked at me for a moment, and then, laughing heartily, said, "Well, you are a clever fellow. You have as completely turned the tables on me as you did on the Colonel." Then he added gravely: "If Lucy is willing, my dear Charlie, I have no objection; only what about funds? Two are not as easily kept as one; have you thought about that?"

"Oh, yes," I said. "I expect my troop within twelve months, and you know I had a few hundreds a year of my own to start with; well, I have saved the greater part of my income, and have quite a little nest egg put by."

"Bravo," said he, "I like to hear of a young fellow saving money; if he does so as a bachelor he will make all the better husband."

Bolton coming to claim his interview, I made some excuse or other and withdrew.

During luncheon I managed to arrange for a walk with Lucy in the afternoon. On our return after a pleasant ramble, during which I need hardly say everything was most satisfactorily settled between us, we met Mary in the garden. When I ventured to solicit a kiss she declined, saying she never kissed gentlemen. "Why," I replied, "I saw you kiss Harry a minute ago."

"Oh, yes," she answered, "but he is my brother."

"Well," I said, "I am your brother also, or at any rate about to become so."

"Are you really," she asked, brightening up.

"If you have any doubts, ask Lucy," was my reply.

This produced blushes but confirmation also, which appeared to satisfy the young lady, who accepted the salute with a very good grace, I thought. Then she laughed and said: "I seem to be getting a lot of brothers to-day, for Captain Bolton told me the same thing when I met him with Emma a little time ago."

This amused us much.

We had so prolonged our walk that little time was left except to dress for dinner, and I had not an opportunity of seeing Bolton until we met in the drawing-room, when we exchanged congratulations.

We had not been long in the room before Colonel and Mrs. Mallory

entered in great state, the former in full evening dress. Going straight up to Mrs. Curran, the lady said, "Allow me to introduce Colonel Mallory to you," while he, bowing, added, "Clothed, and in his right mind!"

I happened to be at that part of the room, and, as usual, had Mary with me. When she saw the Colonel, she said, "Oh, what a pretty man the Colonel looks now."

Seeing her whispering to me, Mallory called out laughingly: "What is that young lady saying?"

"Well," I returned, "as she told a story about me yesterday, I may tell one about her to-day," and I mentioned what she had said to me.

The Colonel seemed quite pleased, and Mrs. Mallory said: "Won't you give the Colonel a kiss, my dear?"

"Is he going to be a brother also?" said the little wretch.

"What do you mean?" asked several.

"Oh," replied she, "Captain Bolton and Mr. Crawford told me to-day I must kiss them because they were going to be my brothers."

This statement created much amusement and not a little confusion to those particularly interested. The merriest was the Colonel himself, who said: "So it has come to this; my garments will do to dance in at the weddings."

And dance he did. But I shall not go into particulars, concluded the Major, as I might draw such a picture that, on my return from the six months' furlough I take to-morrow, I should find all the "subs." in the regiment engaged men at least, if some had not even gone further! Here, therefore, I shall end my story, which I trust you have found not uninteresting.

"Bravo, bravo, Major," sounded from all sides.

"I had no idea, Crawford," said our chief, "that such an element of romance was connected with your marriage, and I think, gentleman," he added, looking round, "we can't do less than accord a vote of thanks to Crawford for his story, and express the hope that, on a future occasion, he will give us something more."

"Agreed, agreed," cried the others.

We soon broke up, and the "Good-nights" of the party, as each sought his quarters, were all that disturbed the stillness.

I. ROBERTSON MACKENZIE.

THE COST OF A KISS.

THERE was quite an unusual animation in the old-fashioned High Street of the little town of Willowbrook. It was occasioned by the clattering of the hoofs, the baying of the hounds, and the cracking of the whip of the young Lord Willowbrook and a party of neighbouring squires, who were on their way to the hunt. The children ran behind them cheering lustily, the shopkeepers came to their doors, and the maids who were out shopping dropped blushing curtsies in answer to the salutes of the lord of the manor and his companions.

"Marry come up!" said Mrs. Bodkin, the milliner, who was standing at her shop door, looking after the little cavalcade with pronounced admiration. "He is a real beauty and no mistake!"

"Who may that be, my dear madam?" said old Doctor Featherfew, who was buying a pair of mittens to match his snuff-coloured coat.

"Why, the young Lord Willowbrook, to be sure," said Mrs. Bodkin, preparing for an agreeable gossip. "Dearie me, it's a mortal shame a handsome gen'lman like that don't marry; I am sure we should all be glad to see a Lady of the Manor."

"My dear Mrs. Bodkin," said old Dr. Featherfew, raising his hands with affected dismay, "pray don't mention such a thing! It would cost me half my practice! Why, are you not aware that half my female patients are dying in love for the young squire, and that the other half would be if they were young enough? Come, now, Mrs. Bodkin, confess that you are in love with him yourself."

The buxom milliner shook her finger reprovingly at the old doctor, but did not think fit to answer his question.

"They do say he has a mint of money?" she said interrogatively.

"Yes, to be sure," said the good doctor, taking a pinch of snuff with much gusto; "but he is wise enough to keep it to himself. He is a young fellow I admire. He is not the sort of man to lose his head over some pink-cheeked damsel."

"Well, more's the pity!" said Mrs. Bodkin indignantly. "A handsome young man like that, all alone in the world, and with plenty of money, was made to marry."

"There we differ, my dear madam," said Dr. Featherfew amiably; and, having paid for his mittens, he trotted jauntily out of the shop.

It was a grand morning for a hunt. The dew lay thick on the grass and sparkled like a myriad gems in the bright sunshine. The hunters opened their mouths and drank in the keen morning air as they dashed after the beagles, past farm and homestead, over hedge and ditch, up hill and down dale. The fox was a gallant fellow, and fled like the wind before his pursuing foes, who followed the scent

with nose to the ground and tail erect. After a dashing chase, in which many a horseman was left behind, Sir Renard slackened speed at last, and in another moment Lord Willowbrook shouted the "view halloo!" By this time they had formed a semi-circle, and were half way back to Willowbrook village. On the crest of the hill stood a little stone-built house covered with jasmine and virginia creeper. It was the little school of Willowbrook, and the sing-song of the children came through the open door and mingled with the faint baying of the tired beagles, who panted up the hill after their tired victim. They were close upon him now, and in another moment his fate would have been sealed, when suddenly there was a cry of astonishment from Lord Willowbrook, who was the foremost huntsman.

"By jove, the animal has run into the school-house!" It was a fact; the poor tired beast had seen the open door, and had dashed in to escape the fangs of the hounds behind him. The children in the school set up a frightened shriek, and the school-door was rapidly banged to in the face of the hungry beagles, who ran to and fro, baying and whimpering in frantic excitement.

"Well, this is certainly a rum go," said Lord Willowbrook, as the other huntsmen struggled up. "What shall we do?"

"Call off the hounds and get inside," said Frank Cowley, the parson's madcap son.

After some consultation this was finally agreed upon. The school-door had been locked and nobody opened after repeated knocking, so with very little ceremony, Frank Cowley put his shoulder to the door and attempted to burst it open. It was a solid piece of oak, with strong bolts outside, a somewhat singular arrangement, only used when the place was empty. The lock resisted all his attempts; but, when half-a-dozen stalwart fellows hurled themselves against it, it yielded. The dozen or so young huntsmen entered pell-mell into the school-room, but pulled themselves up suddenly when they realised their situation.

At the end of the large room, on a little raised dais, upon which was a school desk, stood a young girl, surrounded by a group of little children who were clinging to her skirts in terror at the sudden invasion. She was a slim, fair girl, in a plain tight-fitting black dress, with a mass of sunny golden hair; and, as she stood by her desk, with flushed cheeks and an angry light in her blue eyes, she looked very pretty and haughty.

"May I ask the meaning of this unwarrantable intrusion, gentlemen?" she said in a clear silvery voice.

The young huntsmen touched their caps but could not find anything to say.

"Gadzooks, what a pretty gal!" whispered the irrepressible Frank Cowley.

Lord Willowbrook was the first to speak.

"Madam," he said, in that deep, musical voice of his which caused

such a thrill to the hearts of the female inhabitants of Willowbrook, "we sincerely ask your pardon, but—but we are rough huntsmen, our fox took refuge in your school, and in the ardour of our sport, we have, perhaps, forgotten our manners."

"I think that is the case," said the schoolmistress with a faint suspicion of a smile. "However, gentlemen, you will not find your fox here, because it has gone up the chimney, where you are at perfect liberty to follow it."

The huntsmen burst into a merry laugh which put them at their ease.

The young lord of the manor sat down on the foremost bench and looked round curiously at the little schoolroom, fitted with rows of wooden desks, and decorated with coloured maps and charts. Then his eyes returned to the pretty schoolmistress, with the golden hair, and to the little group of village children who had recovered from their fright, and were peeping behind her skirts.

"Really, this is quite charming!" said the young man pleasantly, as if to open a conversation.

"Reminds me of one's youth, doesn't it?" said Mr. Frank Cowley, sitting down on another bench, and taking up one of the children's slates.

"I say, schoolmistress," said Tom Hardy, one of the neighbouring squires, more renowned for his good temper than for his brilliant wit, "'spose you give us a lesson?"

This proposition was received with a general burst of applause from the huntsmen, who sat down with much clatter and jingle of spurs in the children's benches, and possessed themselves with slates and pencils. The school-children, who were beginning to think the whole scene fine fun, clapped their hands at the idea of "schoolmistress" teaching twelve big huntsmen in scarlet jackets.

"A lesson! A lesson!" cried the huntsmen.

"Certainly," said the schoolmistress, with a mischievous twinkle in her blue eyes. "I will give you a lesson on manners!"

"Fairly well hit, in faith!" cried Frank Cowley with a roar of laughter.

The schoolmistress stepped before the blackboard, and surveyed the young men who were sitting before her with broad grins on their faces. It was a trying situation for a young girl, but the schoolmistress looked quite calm and self-possessed, save that there was a bright red rose on each cheek.

"Perhaps, gentlemen," she said in a clear decisive tone, as if she were delivering a lecture, "perhaps you have not been told before that it is extremely rude for gentlemen to wear their hats in a room where there are ladies."

The huntsmen looked at each other rather sheepishly, and pulled off their caps hastily.

"You also seem to be unaware of the fact," continued the school-

mistress, with a triumphant smile at her success, "that no gentleman has a right to be seated, while a lady stands, without first obtaining permission."

Lord Willowbrook rose from his seat with a stately bow, and his companions followed his example.

"Thirdly and lastly," continued the schoolmistress, "it is the height of bad manners to intrude oneself where one is not wanted."

The dozen or so young squires went off into prolonged laughter, during which the schoolmistress resumed her place at her desk with much dignity, but with a smile lurking at the corners of her mouth.

When the laughter had subsided, Lord Willowbrook stepped forward and bowed low before the fair instructress.

"Madam," he said, "my companions will, I am sure, join me in apologising profoundly for the grave breach of etiquette of which we have been guilty, and I beg to assure you, in their name, and in my own, that we will not forget the lesson which you have given us."

The huntsmen applauded vigorously, and cried "Hear, hear!" with much enthusiasm.

"I beg to second my friend's speech," said Frank Cowley, "and thank you heartily for your valuable instruction. Before we take our leave, however, we must not omit the payment of so great a favour."

"Hear, hear!" shouted the huntsmen. "The payment!"

"As payment," continued the parson's son, with much gravity, "I propose that before we take our leave, we each and severally give our fair schoolmistress—a kiss!"

"A kiss! A kiss!" shouted the young fellows enthusiastically.

The schoolmistress turned pale, and retreated behind the blackboard.

"At your peril, gentlemen!" she cried indignantly.

"A kiss! A kiss!" shouted the huntsmen, rising from their seats, and surrounding the blackboard.

They were about to carry out their intention, when young Lord Willowbrook sprang forward and placed himself between his friends and the blackboard.

"Stop gentlemen!" he shouted authoritatively.

His companions started back, surprised and angry.

"Faith! You're not going to be fool enough to spoil sport?" said Mr. Frank Cowley, irritably.

"Gentlemen," said the young lord of the manor determinedly, "I will horsewhip any one who dares to touch this lady. I appeal to your sense of honour. We are a dozen against one, and it would be unmanly to insult this lady after so well merited a lesson as she has given us."

"My dear fellow," said Frank Cowley, "it is all very well for you, who have sworn eternal indifference to the fair sex, but you might make allowances for us poor devils who are not so philosophical."

"I will fight any one who dares to touch this lady!" said the lord

of the manor, raising his whip menacingly, and flashing fire out of his black eyes.

The huntsmen looked at each other with hesitation. Willowbrook evidently meant what he said, and he was not the sort of man to tackle.

"Oh, well, don't let's quarrel over it," said Cowley, at length. "Kisses are not so scarce that they are worth fighting over. Come on, you fellows, let us turn back and get something to drink." So saying, the young men sauntered out of the schoolroom whistling carelessly.

His fellow-huntsmen scowled angrily at Lord Willowbrook, but followed their companion's lead, and, swinging into their saddles, cantered back to Willowbrook village.

Lord Willowbrook rode behind them for a little way, but when he came to the bend of the road, by the old mill, he suddenly turned his horse's nose, and galloped back to the little school-house on the hill. He tied his horse to the stump of a tree, and sauntered into the school again. It was Saturday—a half-holiday—and all the children had gone, but the schoolmistress was engaged in putting away the books.

She started at the clatter of Willowbrook's spurs on the threshold, and blushed a deep crimson when she saw who was her visitor.

"May I ask what—what is the cause of your return?" she said nervously.

"Madam," said the young man, smiling pleasantly, and with a gallant bow, "I have come for the favour of a kiss."

The schoolmistress retreated hastily, and placed herself behind a desk.

"I—I do not understand you, sir. After your generous defence, for which I thank you much, I am sure you do not mean what you say. Perhaps you are joking?"

"No, madam," said the young huntsman, with cool assurance, "that is the inconsistency of human nature. Because I do not permit my friends, Frank Cowley, Tom Hardy, William Eccles, and the others, to salute your fair cheeks with a kiss, is no reason why I, Austin Willowbrook, lord of the manor, should deny myself that pleasure."

"My lord, I am sure you will do no such thing," said the schoolmistress.

"Madam, I most assuredly shall!" said the young man.

The schoolmistress looked for some means of escape, but Lord Willowbrook stood with his back to the door.

"Well, my lord, you must first catch you hare!" she said defiantly, and made a little dart for the blackboard, behind which she took refuge.

"That is easily done," said Lord Willowbrook, with an agreeable sense that he was an accomplished sportsman, and that this was very easy game.

But it was not so easy as he thought; every time he got round one

desk, the little schoolmistress darted behind another. No sooner had he vaulted over one bench than she disappeared behind the blackboard. Lord Willowbrook soon got considerably winded, especially as he had to stop now and then for a hearty laugh. The schoolmistress's cheeks were brightly flushed, and her eyes darted mischievous defiance at her pursuer, so that she looked prettier than ever, and Lord Willowbrook vowed he would not give up until his object had been attained. Presently there was a mutual truce.

"I think you had better give up," said the schoolmistress.

"Never!" said Lord Willowbrook.

"I am hungry, my lord, and want to get home to dinner."

"You can easily do so."

"How?"

"By letting me kiss you," said Lord Willowbrook calmly.

The schoolmistress thought for a moment.

"I will let you do so, on one condition," she said at last.

"What is that?" said Lord Willowbrook.

"If you will promise to remain here until I've had time to get half way to Willowbrook village."

"Agreed," said Lord Willowbrook cheerfully.

The schoolmistress came from behind the blackboard, and waited shyly for the young man to approach her. Lord Willowbrook stepped forward, and lifting up the girl's head, and looking into her blue eyes, he imprinted a kiss on her lips.

It did not take long, and before the young man had finished a sigh of satisfied ambition, the schoolmistress darted away from him, and seized her cloak and little poke bonnet.

"You shall pay dearly for this, my lord!" she cried, with flushed cheeks and an indignant frown.

"Anything you please," said Lord Willowbrook with perfect good humour. "So great a pleasure is worth any price."

But he was not quite prepared for the little schoolmistress's next move. Before he could realize the situation she had darted out of the little house, the great oak door was slammed to, and the bolts were thrust into their sockets.

The young man started up and ran to the door.

"Caught, by Jove!" he cried.

It was true. The door was securely fastened from without, and resisted all efforts to budge, the little lattice windows were too small to admit of egress, and he was imprisoned like a rat in a trap.

"I wish you good-day, my lord!" cried the schoolmistress, with a triumphant peal of silvery laughter, and then the young man heard the sound of her retreating footsteps, which gradually grew fainter and fainter, and finally died away.

Lord Willowbrook paced up and down the schoolroom uttering expressions of astonishment and admiration, and stopping every now and then to give vent to a peal of convulsive laughter.

"Gadzooks!" he cried. "That was a very pretty trick, in faith; an exceeding pretty trick!"

He stopped before the schoolmistress's desk and made a courteous bow.

"Madam," he said, "I have unbounded admiration for so nimble a wit. I am fairly trapped, I confess, but I esteem it an honour to be taken prisoner by so fair an enemy."

Taken prisoner he was. There was not the slightest chance of escape, and his only hope was that his captor would repent and come back to liberate him. But hour after hour passed and the schoolmistress did not return. He examined the maps on the wall, the initials carved on the desk, the ink-stains on the floor; still she did not come. Hour after hour went by until the light began to fail and twilight crept in through the lattice windows, and Lord Willowbrook became very cold and hungry. Still he did not lose his temper, or wish that he had not been so eager for a kiss, and he paced up and down, holding imaginary conversations with the little schoolmistress, in which he expressed his undying admiration for her trick, and offered her his hand and heart.

"Madam," he said, sitting on the corner of a desk, and talking to the blackboard. "Although I could have had many a fair damsel for the asking, yet I have never loved before, but now I am fairly caught. When I gave you that kiss, I gave you also my heart. Will you not take my name and fortune in exchange?"

But the schoolmistress did not come to answer him, and at last the twilight deepened into darkness, and he realized that he would have to spend the night in the little school-house. At last he fell into a confused sleep, disturbed by dreams of the little schoolmistress, and he awoke next morning feeling very cold and hungry.

It was Sunday, and the church bells in Willowbrook Village were ringing for service. He could picture all his friends trooping into the little church, and wondering at his disappearance. What a fool he should look when the story became known! He, the lord of the manor, who had disdained the advances of the combined female forces of Willowbrook, to be caught in the toils of a little schoolmistress. He would be the laughing-stock of the country side. He would not dare show his face outside the Manor House.

The day passed tediously for the young man, and he was beginning to picture a death by slow starvation, when the sound of approaching voices, the clatter of horses' hoofs, and the tramp of many feet, sounded joyfully in his ears.

"At last!" he cried, springing up from a bench on which he had been reclining.

The sounds grew nearer and presently stopped before the little school, and Lord Willowbrook blushed when he heard the laughter of many voices.

"Now for a nimble wit!" muttered the lord of the manor. "Help me, all ye powers, to get out of this pretty scrape!"

The bolts were drawn back, the door was thrown open and disclosed to the eyes of young Lord Willowbrook half the population of Willowbrook village, foremost among whom was the pretty schoolmistress with the golden hair, accompanied by Messrs. Frank Cowley, Tom Hardy and William Eccles, while the rear was brought up by old Parson Cowley, in threadbare coat and white bands, with old Dr. Featherfew and Mrs. Bodkin.

A burst of derisive laughter greeted the young man as he stepped out jauntily into the open, and bowed low before the assembled company.

The pretty schoolmistress stepped forward and curtsied to her former prisoner.

"My lord," she said, with a pretty impudence, "I have had my revenge!"

Lord Willowbrook bowed with a pleasant smile.

"'Tis true, madam," he said, in so low a tone that it could be heard by none save the schoolmistress, "and I will now have mine."

So saying, he took the young girl in his arms before she could escape from him, and kissed her again and again before the astounded villagers.

Then he turned to the little group who were staring at the scene in open-mouthed astonishment.

"Gentlemen," he cried, in a loud triumphant voice, "permit me to present to you my future wife—the Lady of the Manor!"

PHILIP GIBBS.

"DRINK HAËL!"

SHE pledged the Roman in a costly draught—

That fierce Egyptian queen—and yet she threw
Only a pearl into the cup she quaffed—

A pale, cold, tasteless pearl. When I pledge you,
I'll cast the love I bear you in the wine.

"Drink haël," I'll say, "in this poor cup of mine!

Drink haël, dear love! Would that I could pour
My soul into the cup for you to drink,

And with that wine your fainting heart restore!

Drink haël, dear love—drink haël! The cup, I think,
(Though all too poor), holds something else than wine;
So drink, dear love, from this poor cup of mine!"

THE INTRICACIES OF CHARACTER.

AS no two faces are exactly alike, so it is with character. There are, of course, types of character, and those belonging to each type resemble one another more or less, but if we were to analyse each individual character minutely, we should discover that the number of differences displayed thereby were as varied as the colours in a kaleidoscope, and far more interesting.

Comparatively few people seem to be aware how much of the character is revealed in the face—at all events to one who studies it—though, of course, some faces are much easier read than others.

I met with an example of this kind a few days ago while discussing a common acquaintance with a friend. The latter said something in praise of the subject, and I replied, "Yes, I should think so, he has a *nice* face." At which my friend said, "I am not talking about his *good looks*, I am talking about his character." I replied, "So am I; I judge his character by his face." This seemed to be quite a new, and an amusing idea to him; whereupon I went on to explain that a *nice* face, from a physiognomist's point of view, *might* not be at all good-looking in the generally accepted sense of the term. I did not say *could* not be. A so-called handsome face was, occasionally, very ugly, physiognomically, and a plain one often beautiful to one who reads the character through the face.

The same characteristics frequently run in one family, and this accounts somewhat for the fact that some brothers and sisters, or parents and children, who are too much alike, do not get on well together. It is a great pity when it is so, and still worse when it is the husband and wife who "do not hit it," as the phrase goes.

For congenial companionship, one requires a comrade sufficiently like to sympathise with one's pursuits, whether they are work or play, but to live in unity two persons should not share the same weaknesses, or they will be continually rubbing one another up the wrong way. For instance, I have the case of a brother and sister in my mind now, who are both hasty, independent, and self-willed, and neither will ever give in the least bit to the other, consequently they are always at war. There is some hope for them as each may find a more suitable companion in marriage. The prospect of a whole life like that is anything but pleasant to contemplate, though, of course, a little forbearance on both sides would very much improve matters.

An artist need not marry an artist, to be happy, or an author an author, but it is better for the former to choose someone with an eye for colour, and an appreciation of art, or there will be no sympathy between them, and the latter to choose a wife who will take some

sort of interest in his work, and not fall asleep over his essays or articles.

It is not always easy to find the secret of, or describe, this congeniality which causes us to get on so much better with some than with others, though I think it may often be traced to sympathy, which passes like an electric current from one person to another; and the reason we feel so much more drawn to some people is because there is something in their nature which corresponds with our own hearts, and unconsciously we respond. Take an extreme case: we are out for a walk on a cold winter's day; it would take the financial balance of a Rothschild to give to all who ask, and perhaps we pass a dozen beggars with a deaf ear (though personally I never pass one without a pang, however undeserving I may deem him or her), but to the thirteenth we give, maybe even more than we could afford, because something in the expression of the face (not the professional long face and whine practised by so many beggars) touched that electric chord of sympathy more strongly than we could resist; and we go on our way happier, not because of our charity, but because we have experienced a bond of sympathy with, and in part understood, a fellow-creature.

Apropos of sympathy, you often hear people say that such an one is a good actor, speaking of some one who can hide his feelings well. With this I beg leave to differ, for a man may be a very good actor, and yet a very bad hand at hiding his emotions, for in the best acting there is no "pretending" as many persons seem to think. For the time being you are, to all intents and purposes, *the* person you personate, so thoroughly do you identify yourself with the character that his joys are your joys, his sorrows your sorrows; and the emotions you express are therefore *real*, and no sham.

On the other hand, a man may be able to mask his feelings admirably, and be wonderfully successful in deceiving people, but if he had to personate some one else—unless a person of his own calibre—in all probability he would be a failure, through *inability to sink his own identity*; for the secret of good acting is sympathy, a quality which an habitual deceiver would lack.

Sometimes it happens that a mask *has* to be worn, and is a noble one,

"To cover a soul full of sadness
Too proud to acknowledge defeat,"

or a cheerfulness assumed to keep up the courage of those we love.

If so, and you are sad, try to find some who are still sadder—you will probably not have far to seek—and endeavour to cheer them up; and, whether you succeed or not in the desire and effort to do good, you will benefit yourself. A smile, or a kind word, costs nothing, and may cheer, and give new life to a weary heart.

It was the charming personality and kindness of the late lamented Duchess of Teck that endeared her to all who had the privilege of

knowing her, far more than her generosity in gifts of money, though for that she will be missed not a little.

Better to erect a monument in the hearts of fellow-creatures by loving deeds, than to be handed down to posterity in the Temple of Fame. The latter is reserved for a limited few, but in the former, all who wish can compete, the lowest with the highest, for it requires neither skill, education, nor money.

Persons who are wholly self-centred and self-endearing are not really happy, for the truest happiness consists in making, or endeavouring to make, others happy, and the reward is in the doing; and if we were always as lenient with the failings of others as we are with our own, many an unkind word which has to be recorded against us would remain unsaid.

Then again, if we thought sufficiently about it, we should be very charitable in judging others, for how do we know the strength of their temptation, or how they may have struggled against it? A man who does not know the meaning of hunger sits in judgment upon a man who has stolen a loaf of bread to keep his wife and children from starving. Sometimes, though, the judge realises this, and the sentence passed is both wise and kind.

I fear there is a good deal of the Pharisee in many of us. We hear of someone who has done wrong, and we thank God that we are not as other men are, for *we* would not have done so. Perhaps not, in our present circumstances, but how can we say what we should have done in a similar position? And supposing even that we *should* have done better, is it any credit to ourselves if we are born minus evil propensities, that we thus plume our feathers with such self-complacency? Thank God by all means, but let it be in a humble spirit, and let pity for the one less fortunate than ourselves be the dominating influence in our breast.

Surely, in the inevitable law of retribution the sinner will suffer sufficiently for the sin? Though doubtless when we have to come before the Great Judge to answer for our misdeeds, those who were born in vice and crime, and have had all their faculties trained to sin from earliest infancy, will be counted less responsible for their actions than those who were taught right from wrong in the cradle, but have wilfully used their education and knowledge as a means of cheating, thereby rendering their crimes the more difficult of detection.

The intricacies of character are so numerous that it is more by chance than anything else if we hit on the right treatment, unless the subject is some one near to us, whose disposition we have studied, and understand. For instance: take two children and set them both the same lesson, with a stated time in which to do it. One is clever, but conceited and indolent, the other has only a moderate share of ability, but is persevering, hardworking, and very diffident. The first one will rattle off the lesson in about a quarter of the allotted time, and not even take the trouble to read it through, and hands it up

with a "beat that if you can," air. The second will not, perhaps, have finished when the time expires, though he has been working diligently all the while, and he parts with it in fear and trembling, being painfully conscious of his own deficiencies.

The paper of the first subject is good, but it might have been a great deal better if he had taken pains with it; so what you have to do is to make him ashamed by finding as many faults with it as possible. This will have the effect of toning down his conceit, and making him exert himself to do better. But this treatment will not do for the second subject, for he has tried his best; his paper is far inferior, but you must not tell him so, for if you scold him and order him to write another, you will crush him, and incapacitate him for further work, for his faith in himself, which was poor before, will be killed. Give him the credit for having tried to do well, find out all the good points in it, and the bad ones, too, if you like, but make more of the good than the bad, and next time he will do better, for his too diffident opinion of himself will be raised.

Some people seem to think that constantly dunning into our ears how bad we are is a royal road to improvement, whereas many children would grow up to be better men and women if they were told a little less often of their badness, and given a little more credit for their goodness.

Perhaps these ideas may not strike the reader as being particularly new or original; no doubt similar thoughts often occur to thoughtful people; but the subject, at all events, is worthy of contemplation and study.

As long as we live in this world we shall have to deal with character, more or less successfully according to our efforts, and by carefully studying the thoughts, moods, and feelings of others, we shall better understand our own hearts, and have a greater chance of being, in our turn, understood. And by looking for the best qualities, and not the worst, we shall discover the infinite good of which human beings are capable.

H. M. E. STANTON.



HELEN CROMLA.

BY KATHLEEN WATSON.

I THINK of a little thing that happened once amongst us here, that had its glory and its brief pathetic day, and now has gone to swell the burden of that thronging silent host we have always with us under the gentle name of memories.

And I see a morning full of light and gold, strong with the rare north wind rolling in across the bright sea-way, rich with the scent from the wild thyme clustering on the cliffs and the pine-lands stretching away to the island heart; an hour of swiftly pulsing joy of life, when the things which sometimes may seem common to us were touched with a graciousness, charged with an inspiration indefinable, from the shimmer on the water to the dashing of the tiny lark across the azure heavenly plains, the sweetness of the lowly grasses drooping with the early dew, the white flash of the seagulls' breasts against the yellowing harvest fields.

It was a Sunday morning, following up one of those terrible summer storms whose very untimeliness adds somehow to their disorder, as though in the depths of a tender song, one should suddenly break out into wild anathemas. First there had come the thunder, and the great midnight darkness broken only by the crooked lightning-gold as it flashed a moment's unearthly radiance across the mountains and even to the uttermost places of the glens. Then surely Æolus must have let loose the four winds from his cave in the far-off Æolian Isles, laughing perhaps as he watched the havoc that they wrought upon our shores. The violent sea ran, as we say, mountains high, against the coast; its great white spasms of rage tore the air with fury unabated for fourteen hours; the thunder of the surge upon the shore was distinctly heard for three miles inland; while for two nights and a day the trawlers and the herring-boats, not daring to make for port, had been tossing about on the ungovernable waste until, at last, the great tumult slowly sobbed itself away. The new day came on, faintly smiling at first, then awakening to a nameless grace, a pageant of splendour: the keen, sweet, north wind, like an Arctic breath over the June pastures, alone stayed with us. The other winds went home.

Anxious hearts had they who lined the beach in that Sabbath dawn. Scarcely a woman there but had a son, a husband, or a lover among the crews of the little boats that had gone forth so trustingly to their labour in the calm twilight of two days before. When the masts of the tiny fleet were seen at last through the luminous mists

that veiled the distance, and it was known that half an hour would bring it into port, a loud cheer went up from the weary watchers on the shore. Helen Cromla, who was to be married within a fortnight, and whose lover was out there with the others—or else, perhaps, was not—could not join in that cheer. She smiled, and her lips parted, but her heart must have been too full for expression either of dismay or joy.

On Saturday nights the fishing-boats never go out, so that a landing of any sort on Sunday morning, unless in an exceptional case like the present, is an unknown thing. By reason of which, the curious as well as the care-struck ones were there, fringing the water's edge, their eager faces like open story-books; some wistful, some wondering, some drawn with painful doubting; all turned seawards to where the morning glory shimmered on the waves, weaving a cloth of gold about the entrance to the harbour, as though for the home-coming of a royal fleet.

Slowly, irregularly, one by one, or sometimes two abreast, they pierced the haze, the sorry little skiffs—one—two—three; yes, in time, the whole fifteen. Their sails swung to and fro in shreds, their masts in many cases had been wrenched away, but not a boat was lost, and another great cheer sounded from the beach. When all at last were landed, it was found that out of fifty-seven men four alone had been washed overboard and drowned, a marvellous record when one thought of the wildness of the storm and the comparative frailty of the craft. Two of the lost ones were strangers to our part of the island; another was a gruff and grim old man who lived alone and left no heart to break or be distressed behind him; but the fourth was the only son of Widow Scott. I saw the minister—who, in his long black gown, was on the beach, waiting to set up prayer or praise—go to her with hands stretched out in silent sympathy, and then I saw no more, for there are faces on whose agony not even dearest friends may look. But I turned to Helen Cromla, whose arms were bravely clasped around her love, and whose eyes were shining with a quiet rapture. On the little sun-strewn beach, as in the great laughing, weeping world, the hearts that sing for joy immeasurable beat very close to those that ache; that ache so sorely.

Janet Millar, whose eyes, smile they never so kindly on all and sundry, are yet never shut to a kindness that reaps a solid harvest too, did a frantic trade in serving out from a kind of truck rolled on to the shingle, hot coffee, scones and broiled fish to the famishing souls that clustered round her. Their hunger satisfied, they made a group about the minister, and every head was bared and every voice was hushed as the well-loved accents of thanksgiving fell, expressing what those poor rough fishermen could hardly have said for themselves; just as, on a different scale, a great man takes a thought that may be vaguely, dimly common to all and sets it down in language of fine gold.

Then the wind caught up the music of the Lord's Day hymn, as

with one accord they sang it there by the water's edge, a storm-beaten choir indeed to look at, their jerseys torn, their hair stiffened by the brine, their faces black and blistered from exposure.

"At Thy feet, O Lord, we lay
Thine own gift of this new day. . . ."

Very sweetly to the ear the voices rose and fell, the great diapason of the ocean swelling softly to the strain. The faint white mists through which the sun's golden breath was shining, floated like incense across the sea. And one's random thoughts got somehow back down all the long cold ages to the dawn of that primeval sabbath when the world lay stainless, sinless, fresh from the touch of Him who had laid its corner-stone, and when, beholding it, the morning stars sang together and all the sons of God shouted for joy.

But amongst those island-voices, one there was, outsinging in beauty all the rest, as Sirius outshines the other stars; a glorious voice that seemed to have caught the light and strength of the wakening day, the music of the ocean and the woods; the voice of John McRae, the young precentor in the village kirk, the lover of Helen Cromla, the surest at wielding an oar, a scythe or a curling-stone, of finding his way to a woman's heart, and keeping his place there too—of any man upon the island.

There was a visitor on the beach that morning; a strange-looking man with dark piercing eyes, sallow sunken cheeks and long hair hanging in little shreds about the back of the head. Very little was ever distinctly known of him, but it was ascertained in the after days that he was a musical director and was concerned in the management and organisation of operatic companies. One thing at least is certain, that he met John McRae that same evening, just where the gold of the corn lies glinting against the edge of the forest-lands that slope to the western sea—that he said to him—and, oh! the mighty persuasion there must have been in his silken accents—

"My friend, the world wants voices such as yours. And what it wants it still pays for ungrudgingly, in showers, nay, storms of gold. So—come—with me."

* * * * *

There is a love that nothing daunts, that dares to hope in the face of hopelessness, to trust in the face of treachery, to be sweet and lowly against a strong tide of bitterness and dismay. It is not often found perhaps, and the world not altogether understanding, has strange names for it. It put a loftiness in her heart, a gravity in her smile, a pity in her ways, a sweet patience in her eyes to whom it came, for whom the other dear things of this life had flown. Lover, marriage, home, companionship, the daily doing, the daily watching, sometimes the daily suffering for the dearest one, not these, nor ever these for her, yet always, everlastingly, the love.

I have seen her in the fields at harvest-time, strong and tireless,

working with the reapers from dawn till dusk, then going in the late long twilight, past the little burying-ground at the entrance of the glen, on her lonely pilgrimage to the spot where her love was called away from her to greater things than she could ever be to him. And I have known how night by night she passes over to the cottage on the cliffs and lights the lamp in Widow Scott's one front window, so that the fishermen out at sea may take heart of comfort at the shining of its tiny ray. Widow Scott is bed-ridden now, and often lying sleepless through the long night, it pleases her poor fancy, grown dim perhaps through stress of poverty and pain, to see him whom minister and neighbours so persistently call dead coming back to her again, it may be when all the world is dark, guiding his eager homesick steps by the light of that same lamp. The people smile knowingly and call her "daft, poor thing!" But Helen Cromla never fails her. In storm or calm, the little lamp is always hung.

Not that these are great things to do, but a great loss does not always set a great loving-kindness in its stead.

And so it was that the days of toil and mercy, of freedom in the fields, of strong young arms browned and bared unstintingly to their labour—and when this was over, were held out to whatsoever else of love they could fulfil—that the days grew into years. And when three of these were spent Helen Cromla learnt suddenly that her love was singing in the great grim town eastwards beyond the islands and that his triumph was indeed a goodly thing to witness: among other proofs of it, bands of enthusiastic students from the university cheering him nightly back to his hotel after the performance.

Then an intolerable longing came to her to hear his voice thrilling the hearts of a mighty audience, as of old it had her own on the quiet evenings by the sea. The love which had lived for so long and thriven so fairly on memories alone, cried out despairingly for just one look at the beloved face. She could not love him less for finding him at the zenith of his fame, just as she could not have loved him more had evil days fallen on him instead, and were he calling her to him across the darkness and the pain of them.

When at last her mind was quite made up that she would go, a nervous misgiving seized her with regard to the serious trifle so to speak of what she ought to wear. She had never left her island shores for the mainland which glittered in the morning-shine across the sea. John was to have taken her over in the early days of their marriage; but since those former things had not gone as they should have done, the bright land beyond the water still lay wondrous, all unknown to her, though in thought she dwelt continually there. For it was John's home. There he had found a great new life which was in no way as the island life of old had been. There he had learnt much and unlearnt even more perhaps. There he had learnt that there are things dearer to a man and more to be desired and

prized by him than his love, the lesson which it is a woman's glory that she can never learn. That world across the sea was to her as some mysterious vast cathedral where the songs of life were set to a glorious music and brave service daily done, but what the Creed was, she could not rightly understand. To visit such a place, it seemed to her that one's clothes should be fair and gentle too, while hers were rough and very, very poor.

As she thought, a sort of wistful wonder crept into her eyes, and underneath her clear brown skin the roses gathered.

At home, laid away at the bottom of the oaken chest was a simple gown of softest grey with a pink ribbon for the throat. It had never been worn; like a little crushed hope it had been put away, and had lain untouched through the lonely love-laden years; sprigs of lavender were hidden in its folds as even crushed hopes give out their perfume.

The next morning when her father and brother had gone to their work and the little cottage lay wrapped in the dawn-light, she drew the dress out of the old chest and with trembling fingers put it on. She was glad, in passing, to find that she had not grown thinner. She tied the ribbon round her throat, drew on the silken mittens laid aside with the gown, and tucked a sprig of white heather in her belt.

On the doorstep she stood for a few seconds, the sun falling slantwise on the lonely figure in its bridal purity. Then with a firm step and a nervously-beating heart she set out to walk the four miles of moorland that lay between her and the point from where the primitive steamer made the daily passage to the mainland. Soon after noon she was in the busy world beyond the island waters winding her way through labyrinths of slums and squares and courts and alleys to where they told her was the Royal Opera House. For six long hours she waited there, feeling neither hunger, fatigue nor fear, with wide eyes fixed on the dingy massive walls within whose chill embrace that beautiful loved voice was presently to sing to the hearts of wondering hundreds.

The subject was "Lohengrin." When the gallant knight came forth on the stage the pent-up enthusiasm of the multitude broke out in wild accord. A dizzy faintness swept over Helen Cromla for an instant. Was this her lover of the former days, this knight in shining armour and silken hose, with the delicate manners and the well-trained tones of one whose lot was no more with the simple people of his kind? And this fair radiant woman with her golden hair falling over gleaming satin robes who glided into his arms, so eagerly outstretched to her, and over whom his passionate notes rang out with glorious tenderness, till every heart in the vast throng was thrilled, electrified, attuned to remember the common distress and care of daily life no more—who was she, what was she doing there fast locked in the love which once had been another's?

More than once it seemed to Helen Cromla that she must call aloud in her agony. But she only sat on, desolate, white and

tearless, in the pink and grey of her wedding-gown. Between the acts when the evening was far spent, she heard a man behind her say to his friend—

"They were married last week, those two who play the parts of Lohengrin and Elsa. No wonder their love-notes ring so marvellously, eh? They say he was once a fisher-lad, yet royalty sent him costly marriage gifts, and the way before him now is paved with gold. Tell me what succeeds better than success, will you?"

At the end of all, they came on the stage together hand in hand, stepping over a carpet of flowers and ribbons to receive the frantic cheers and bravos of the audience. Again and again did Helen Cromla see her love recalled, until at last the curtain was rung down and with bitter steps she went away knowing that on earth she might hope no more.

* * * * *

In the days long after, when time had somewhat taken the glory from her hair and eyes, but in its stead had stamped her countenance with a royal patience, there came to her a man on whom the years had fallen heavily, and he was leading a little child by the hand.

He smiled at Helen Cromla, a smile that had no warmth or joy of meeting, though had he dared he would have fallen on her heart and there asked speechlessly for mercy.

"I have come," he said. "I have come—not to speak of offences which are past forgiveness. But, Helen, see, dear. I am called away to a far-off country and this is my little daughter and there is none into whose keeping I would trust her as I would into your own. My wife is—shall we call it dead? And so may I leave the child with you? You—you have no other claims upon you, have you?"

At his last words she raised her head proudly and gave him a look that went near to scorch his soul. But a minute later the pent-up tears of years were raining heavily on the neck of the little child that stood between them, and she was whispering to it:

"You shall stay with me, dear, and I will love you by day and by night, always—always!"

* * * * *

Many long months afterwards that little child grown into a radiant, happy healthy thing, so beautiful and dear that she was known as the village princess by all around, ran up from her play to Helen Cromla who sat at work unpicking some dainty soft grey fabric to fashion it for another form.

"What are you making, dearest?" inquired the little princess with eager curiosity.

"Ah—well—actually—a new little frock for you to welcome father home in. And if you are very good, I believe there is a pink ribbon somewhere for the throat!"

DOUBTS.

As once we walked beside the winter wave,
 The friend that I loved well spoke much with me
 Of love and death and of eternity,
 And what the life will be beyond the grave.
 Then said I to my friend (while round the cave
 Below the headland moaned the winter sea),

"I know love cannot die; I trust that we
 From out the wreck of Time our loves shall save.
 I trust that death shall answer by-and-by
 These weary questions life in vain must try.
 I am assured that death is love's best friend;
 Of nothing else but death is death the end.
 Yet many a time I sicken with dismay
 To think the things we know shall all decay.

"How often, when I hold your hands in mine,
 And hear the words you say, and see your eyes
 Look kind on me, a sudden fear doth rise
 And wring my heart, to think those eyes that shine
 So tenderly, that voice which answers mine,
 The hands I hold, and all the homely guise
 Must change and have an end. In what new wise
 Shall soul meet soul—give greeting by what sign?
 Have you no fear? We nothing with us brought
 Into this life, and we remember nought
 Of what things were ere we knew thought and sense.
 We carry nothing with us going hence—
 Nothing but love; and how shall love do, torn
 From these dear human ways, where love was born?"

Then (while we walked where winter tides ran free)
 My friend did thus make answer: "Never wave
 Returns the same again; yet round this cave
 This sea has flowed and ebbed unceasingly
 How many ages? Many waves, one sea!
 Thus doubtless shall it be beyond the grave
 With them who from Time's wreck their love shall save;
 Within the present all their past shall be.
 And for the rest, our bodies suffer change
 Here many times, yet we become not strange;
 And far more change our souls, yet are the same
 Throughout all change, as when from God we came.
 Fear not, though cold may gleam the distant goal,
 For everything's immortal to the soul!

"It well may be," he said, "the life to come
 Is less unlike this life than we have deemed;
 It may be all the dreams we here have dreamed
 Of perfect life and love beyond the tomb
 Shall find complete fulfilment—else shall some
 Undreamed-of good befall, above what seemed
 The best to us, to whom such mock suns gleamed
 As here we wandered, exiles far from home.
 Dear is this earthly life, full of delight
 The hearing of the ear, the eyes' keen sight,
 Yet let one nerve jar, and to heart and brain
 The universe becomes a rack of pain.
 Why should we fear to break the prison bars?
 We shall look down and laugh above the stars!"

M. A. M. MARKS.

